NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, *238 William St., N. Y.*

No. 329. *Price, Five Cents.*

NICK CARTER'S CLEVER CAPTURE

OR

THE TIP THAT DIDN'T WORK

WORMS AND THE KID RIPPED THE COVER OFF THE BOX, THEN LIFTED THE UNCONSCIOUS FORM OF NICK, AND PLACED HIM INTO IT.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.90 per year. Entered at Second Class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *238 William St., N. Y. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1903, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.*

No. 329. NEW YORK, April 18, 1903. Price Five Cents.

NICK CARTER'S CLEVER CAPTURE;

OR,

The Tip That Didn't Work.

By the author of "NICHOLAS CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

A SMALL STEAL.

"OFFICE OF WILLIAM MATTHEWS,
"Rooms ——, Chamber of Commerce,
"New York, April 12, 19—.

"MR. NICK CARTER:

"DEAR SIR: Please call at the office this afternoon between four and five. This is strictly personal.

"Yours truly,
"GEO. M. LONG."

The recipient of the above note was shown into the room where the writer awaited him at exactly twenty minutes of five.

Long, the confidential man and legal adviser of William Matthews, the millionaire capitalist, was alone and received the detective with a suave smile.

Suavity was one of his foremost characteristics.

He was a large man, well dressed and groomed, in the neighborhood of fifty.

He had a pink complexion, speaking of good living, and his tone and manner were most courteously complacent.

The detective presented a direct contrast.

His face was smooth shaven, and he wore his hair cropped close to his head.

One could only guess at this man's age.

There was not a wrinkle upon his face, and he sat in his chair with an easy firmness which indicated that his muscles were under perfect control.

There was a look of cool experience in his sharp gray eyes that could scarcely belong to youth.

"Well, Mr. Long," he said in a voice as incisive as a steel blade, "here I am in response to your note."

Long smiled in his suave way.

"Thank you," he said, politely. "The matter I called you here about is a delicate one."

"Yes?"

"I suggested your name to Mr. Matthews, and we decided that you were the detective to be employed in this case."

Nick bowed in acknowledgment to this compliment, although he did not understand what the speaker was driving at.

"We must ask you to attend to this case personally. Can you do so?"

"Yes."

"The reputation of a young person depends upon your decision, and I know you will be cautious."

"The person in question is a female?"

"Yes."

"An employee?"

"Yes; our stenographer."

"What has she been up to?"

"We have lost a parcel of United States Government securities," said Long, slowly.

"And you suspect the girl?"

"Suspect"—said Mr. Long, caressing his left whisker with a very white hand—"'suspect' is a harsh word, Mr. Carter."

"Well, tell me the story," cried the detective, with a little impatience. "It is nearly five. I suppose the girl will be leaving soon and I would want to look at her before she goes."

"You can look at her now, and I will explain the affair afterward.

He stepped over to a door having a glass in the center, and glanced through.

"That is the young lady—Miss Mills," he said, as he gave place to the detective.

The room into which Nick looked was slightly larger than the one in which he stood, and was used by the clerks.

There were two persons in the room.

One, upon whom the detective first turned his glance, was a very fair and modestly-dressed girl of not more than twenty.

Her form was slight but elegant in contour, her hair a golden brown; she possessed also a most ravishing complexion.

"She is a beautiful girl," said Long at his ear.

The latter's voice struck Nick as having something sinister about it, and he turned to glance in his face.

He half caught an expression of mockery, but it quickly flitted, and the calm, genteel cast of features returned.

Sitting upon the corner of a desk was a young man whom the detective knew.

This was Bob Matthews, the millionaire's nephew and presumable heir, as he had no children of his own.

Matthews was a clubman, and something of a sport.

He possessed a keen appetite for pleasure, but much discretion in the enjoyment of it, which was ascribed to his dependence upon his uncle.

"Bob Matthews I suppose you know," said Long, who still lingered at the detective's side.

"Yes."

He was still scrutinizing the expression and manner of the young girl, seeming to analyze each as they arose.

Two minutes passed before he returned to his seat.

"What do you think?" demanded Long.

"She is very pretty."

"But her character?"

"There is no certainty in physiognomy," said Nick. "What is the case?"

"Briefly this: A gentleman from out of the city left with me a parcel of government bonds as collateral security for a loan. I placed the parcel in this drawer"—indicating a drawer in the desk at which he sat—"and went into Mr. Matthews' room, locking the drawer before I went. My conference with Mr. Matthews lasted an hour; when I returned the bonds were gone."

"There can be no mistake about your placing the bonds where you think you did?"

"No; I put another paper in at the same time—that remained."

"What was the value of the package?"

"Two thousand dollars only."

"Was the drawer locked?"

"Yes."

"You carried the key with you?"

"Yes; but there are other keys—the lock is a common one. Miss Mills carries a key."

"Does she have access to this desk?"

"No; she carries the key as a weight on her chain, I suppose."

"How about the door into the corridor?"

"You will notice that it is a spring lock; it may be arranged so as to fasten when closed. I returned with Mr. Hanifran for the purpose of sending the parcel to the deposit vaults, and found the door locked and the parcel gone."

"Mr. Hanifran is a clerk?"

"Yes."

"So the only way access could be had to this room during your absence was by way of the room where the clerks were?"

"Yes."

"Who was there at the time?"

"Miss Mills and Bob Matthews when I returned; but for a part of the time Jenny was alone."

"Did you question her about the matter?"

"Not particularly. Of course I stepped in and said that a parcel was missing; she seemed surprised, and assisted in the search which we made of the desk."

"Then the young lady had an opportunity to abstract the bonds?"

"She certainly did."

"Had she any reason to believe that there were valuables in the drawer?"

"You forget that you have but just been watching the young lady through the glass," remarked Long, smiling.

"But she cannot spend her time looking through that glass?"

"She was alone."

"She remained there during the whole time of your absence?"

"Yes; I inquired, and she said she had not been out of the room."

"What do you know of the girl?" asked the detective, after a moment's thought.

"Little. Her parents live at that number."

And he handed Nick a card.

"This is all you have to communicate?" asked Nick.

"Yes," said Long, gravely, "and now, Mr. Carter, it is Mr. Matthews' wish as well as my own that we should be lenient with the girl; she is young, and this is her first false step. I heartily hope that my fears will prove groundless; but, at any rate, carry on your investigations quietly; do not drive her to despair; some pressure—some great temptation which she could not resist, may have caused her to do this. I have a daughter of my own about her age, and I wish to save the poor girl if I can."

The detective was himself much prepossessed in Jenny Mills' favor, and was likely to use all possible delicacy; still his tone was grim as he arose to go.

"The door into the corridor was locked; the drawer to the desk was locked; no one could have opened the door even with a key, without being heard by Miss Mills, sitting alone in the adjoining room. A strange footstep would have attracted her attention. No one else could have

gained access to the room except yourself—no one else could know of the bonds being in the drawer."

"I fear," and the speaker sadly dropped his eyes, "either she or I must be the thief; but surely I would not have been so simple as to have disposed of the plunder so soon after the robbery."

"What," cried the detective, "have the bonds been thrown upon the market?"

"Yes; I sent a list of the numbers about the city, and I learned last night that they had been bought by a Mr. Dalton. Another thing that has a bad look—Dalton lives only a few blocks from Miss Mills' home."

"This is likely to simplify matters a good deal," Nick remarked, smiling oddly.

"Why has he kept this information till the last?" he thought. "It looks as though he had arranged this interview in his mind beforehand."

He looked at Long sharply; but he was trimming his finger nails, and appeared not to notice.

"What did this Dalton have to say?"

"That an elderly woman came to him just at dusk on the 8th inst., and asked him to purchase some bonds; she did not have them with her; but finding that Dalton would buy, went away. She returned in half an hour or so and sold the bonds to him at a discount. Dalton is a kind of money loaner and bill discounter, I should judge from his letter. I have not seen him, and do not know the particulars."

He gave the detective the letter received from Dalton, and the conversation ended.

Soon after getting his supper Nick started to look up Dalton.

The address on Dalton's letter brought Nick to a flat house, only three or four blocks from the home of Jenny Mills, which he passed on his way down.

He found Mr. Dalton at home.

Indeed, he was an old man and lame, and scarcely ever stirred out.

The detective was shown into a room, half office, half sitting-room, where the old man sat beside a fire, and a sharp-looking urchin was teasing a cat beneath the table.

Mr. Dalton was a tall, stooping, excessively thin figure, wrapped in a faded dressing-gown.

He had a long, pinched nose; thin, bloodless lips and sharp eyes, overhung by bushy eyebrows.

The detective explained his business at once.

"Yes," said the old man, nodding, "I was notified that bonds of a certain number had been stolen from Mr. Matthews, and I informed him that I had them, but I obtained possession by fair and lawful purchase and shall not give them up. No—no, they shall not have them!" and he drew his dressing-gown closer around him as though for protection.

"I am not seeking the restitution of the bonds," said Nick, "but am searching for the thief. When did you buy them?"

"Last Tuesday."

"Of a woman—an old woman?"

"Of a woman I bought them, but I do not know whether she was young or old."

"Your eyes seem unusually good for so old a man."

"Yes—yes, I am eighty years old or more, but I can see well yet, very well, indeed. The woman was dressed like an old woman; but beneath her gray locks her hair was black as jet."

"What!" cried the detective astonished; "she was disguised, then?"

The old man nodded and smiled with senile cunning.

"She came first while I was at supper, and asked me if I would buy some bonds; she told me she was a widow and was going East, and she wanted to sell her bonds to pay the expenses of her journey. I understood that her husband was just dead, and that she was in poor circumstances. She was a respectable-looking woman—nothing like a thief, and I told her I would give her money for bonds.

"She went away, saying that she did not have them with her, and I did not expect her back until the next morning, but she came in about half an hour."

"She brought the bonds?"

"Yes, she showed them to me and I gave her fifty-six dollars in cash, and a check for the balance—the check was cashed in the morning as soon as the bank opened."

"By the same person?"

"No, by a man."

"She must have had a confederate, then," thought the detective, making a mental note of the fact.

"What name did she give?"

"Mary Somers."

"What was the name of the man who cashed the check?"

"I don't remember; you can find out by asking at the bank—the Commercial Bank."

"When did you discover that your visitor wore a wig?"

"Ah! I forgot that. After she had put up her money and arose to go, she went behind the stove, which you see stands pretty close to the wall. She went that way to avoid Charlie—my gran'son, sir, who was pulling her dress and teasing her for money—the rogue is always in some mischief or other—and she caught her cap—she wore a little black silk cap—upon that wire hanging from the pipe, and the cap came off and her gray hair with it, and I saw that underneath her hair was black as a crow's wing, and her neck smooth and white like a girl's. Oh," he concluded, "I can see wonderfully well for a man past eighty."

"I should have thought you would have wished to know where she lived, and why she was——"

"I know where she lives," piped a shrill voice at the detective's elbow.

Turning, he looked down into the sharp face of the urchin, who had been gradually overcoming his diffidence, and now hung upon the back of the visitor's chair.

"So you know where the lady lives, Charlie?"

"Yesser; but I won't tell."

"How did you find out where she lives?"

"I followed her home. She told me she'd give me some candy if I'd let her cane alone; I'll have a cane like that, with a shining gold knob and a silk ribbon, when I grow up, gran'pa."

"So you went to get the candy, eh?"

"Yes, I slipped out when ma opened the door to let her out. Ma didn't see me, and I run for fear she'd drop onto the racket and call me back."

"How far did you go with the lady?"

"Only just to the next street—over that way," pointing.

"And she bought you the candy?"

"Nope; she gave me five cents and I bought it. She told me not to tell and I won't either; for she said she'd give me some more candy next time. I go down there every day, and I don't see her any more. She lives right over a candy store, where they have the prettiest candies and toys you ever saw, and she could get some for me any time. I am afraid she might never get me any if I should tell where she lives, for she didn't want gran'dad to know."

Gran'dad laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks, and he went off into a fit of coughing, while the detective patted the urchin upon the head.

"That's right, my lad," he said, "I'll give you a dime for the secret you don't tell."

CHAPTER II.

HANIFRAN'S TEMPTATION.

Two men came down the steps of a fashionable residence on Madison Avenue, looking back to exchange smiles and words of farewell with a young lady, who had accompanied them to the steps.

One of the men was Long, with his hair scented and his features wreathed in pleasant smiles.

His companion was Henry Hanifran, of whom mention has been made.

The young lady was Miss Pauline Long, daughter of the first named.

Hanifran had barely passed his twenty-first birthday; he had curling brown hair, and features indicative of intelligence, if rather weak power of will.

He lingered at the foot of the steps until his companion had seated himself in the carriage waiting on the drive.

As soon as he had entered he and Long were driven toward the city.

For a considerable distance the silence was unbroken, save for the tread of the horses and the soft roll of the wheels upon the pavement.

Harry sat in the far corner of his seat, watching the lights as they rapidly receded, in the house which they had just left.

He had sunk into a reverie, which did not seem the pleasant one that should belong to the happy lover.

Mr. Long also was very quiet.

He was meditating, however, and evidently upon some matter in which Harry occupied a place.

He was watching the young man from the corner of his eye with an anxiety that was unusual with him.

Several times he appeared upon the point of speaking, but restrained himself.

The younger man grew surprised.

Long usually had his feelings so completely under control that he was very seldom silent in company.

Hanifran thought that he himself was the subject of his superior's cogitations, and he wondered what it could be about.

Was he thinking of the missing bonds?

It seemed scarcely possible; the sum was not large enough to cause any particular uneasiness, and it was supposed that the detective would soon expose the criminal.

Could it be money troubles?

Long was supposed to be wealthy.

As the manager and confidential adviser of William Matthews, he drew a large salary, and it was generally believed that he had made money on his own account.

As these conjectures passed through Hanifran's mind he glanced at his companion with a closer scrutiny.

He obtained little satisfaction from his examination.

Long looked "shaky."

"He must have been speculating largely in the last corner on wheat," mused the young man. "He wouldn't look like that unless his situation was desperate. What a blow it will be to Pauline!"

Glancing up, apparently by accident, Long caught the earnest gaze of the young man fixed upon him.

He smiled and drew himself together with a careless gesture.

"Harry," he said, evidently having read the other's thoughts, "I am on the brink of ruin. Another month will find me a needy man, with expensive tastes and habits. I cannot live on my salary—I have not been able to do so for years. Poor Paula!"

Hanifran trembled at the sound of this name spoken with such emotion, and Mr. Long concealed his face for an instant in his scented handkerchief.

"Is this inevitable?" cried Hanifran, as soon as he could gain control of his voice. "Can nothing be done to prevent this ruin you believe to be impending?"

Long shook his head sadly.

"You have friends. Mr. Matthews—it is his duty to assist you."

"I have tried the temper of my friends already," replied the elder gentleman. "As for Matthews—pshaw! I may as well tell you, he would want to know how I became involved, and he has no sympathy for a losing speculator."

"But you are in his confidence," persisted Harry. "Have been his most intimate associate for years. If he trusts your judgment with his business, surely he will not doubt your attention to your own."

Long smiled grimly.

"I know him best," he said. "He detests gambling or anything that resembles it. If he knew that I had speculated and lost, or had been living beyond my means, he would cast me off if I were twenty times as necessary to him as I am."

The speaker dropped his gaze upon the floor of the carriage.

"There is one way and only one," he muttered as though speaking to himself.

"What is that?" cried Hanifran, eagerly.

Long looked at him hesitatingly.

"You have told me this much, trust me with the rest," pleaded the young man.

"I must trust some one!" cried Long; "why not you, when you and you only can free me from my troubles?"

"Can I?" cried Hanifran, his face brightening. "Tell me how."

The speaker paused for a moment and then said:

"What I propose to do does not appear to me to be dis-

honest. I should wrong no one, and it would preserve me from shame and financial ruin."

As Long ceased speaking he allowed his head to sink upon his hand.

His tone, words and manner were calculated to impress the listener, and he fully succeeded in his design.

Hanifran was so amazed at what he had heard, and felt so much sorrow for his companion's distress, that for a moment he could not speak.

That he was anxious to make any sacrifice that might aid him to a way out of his difficulties goes without saying.

"Anything that I can do," stammered Hanifran at last, "I shall be only too glad to undertake. I hope you believe me, Mr. Long, when I say that there is no man I respect more, or should be more happy to assist."

Long pressed the hand extended to him.

"I do believe you," he said, warmly.

Then he appeared to make an effort to shake off his melancholy, and partially succeeded.

"Well," he said with the laugh that made him a welcome guest in all circles, "I shall explain myself to you, Harry, now that I have gone so far. Unless I have a very large sum of money immediately I am ruined."

"Yes," cried Hanifran, breathlessly.

"I cannot raise this sum, without giving security. I cannot ask my friends to assist me; for I must have the appearance of being financially strong."

"But you said you had a plan," cried the young man.

"So I have, but I hesitate about explaining it. So much depends upon the way you receive it. The short of the matter is that I propose to deposit with the banks a bundle of M. C. R. R. securities owned by Mr. Matthews, and now in our box at the deposit vaults, and thus secure the capital required to help me over the obstacles against which I am being wrecked.

"I know that Mr. Matthews has no present use for the bonds," Long continued, in his most suave tone; "I shall only borrow a small part of their value, and they will be as safe as though they remained where they now are."

"And what do you require of me?" asked Hanifran in a husky whisper; indeed, he could hardly be heard for emotion.

"I want you to take the bonds from the vaults."

"But surely I cannot do that without a direction from Mr. Matthews."

An indescribable smile flitted across the eager face of Mr. Long.

He felt that he had triumphed; that the young man was bending to his will.

"I will manage that part," he said quickly, suppressing his eagerness as well as possible. "No blame shall reach you in any event. It will seem a mistake, and Matthews will never know anything about the matter. Even if he does discover that the securities are not in their place, they will be safe, and he cannot claim that he has been injured."

At this juncture the carriage drew up at the Astor House.

"Tell me, do you consent or refuse?" cried Long in a whisper as he leaned forward to place his hand upon Hanifran's knee.

"If there is no other way, and you have told me all your intentions," answered Henry, "I cannot refuse."

"Thank you!" whispered Long, pressing his hand warmly.

Hanifran thought this a reward for a much greater sacrifice than he was making.

"Mr. Long cannot contemplate any ill use of the securities, even at the worst; and if he fails, old Matthews will lose but a trifle, and, in a manner, he owes half his fortune to Mr. Long."

So Harry reasoned; whether fallaciously or not the sequel will show.

Long got down and ordering his coachman to drive Harry wherever he wished to go, entered the hotel.

Hanifran did not take advantage of this arrangement, however. He got out and walked slowly down the street.

Now that he was alone and the glamour of Long's presence was unfelt, he began to have serious doubts as to the propriety of his assent to the gentleman's singular proposal.

But he disliked Matthews and respected Long; the latter could only mean to do what he said; he frequently had control of large sums of Matthews' money, and why should this be different than other uses?

The bonds would be returned to their place in the vaults of the deposit company undiminished in value, and Long would be preserved from impending ruin.

CHAPTER III.

THREE CHARACTERS DESTINED TO BECOME FAMOUS.

Though Harry little suspected it, it was Mr. Long's purpose to steal the bonds outright. He happened to know a certain man whom he thought would undertake the job of securing the bonds for him, after they were deposited in the safe. His name was Carl Lally. However, the next day, when he left the office to visit this man, he little suspected that a "shadow" was on his track.

This "shadow" was Chick Carter, Nick's able assistant.

It was evident that Nick had some idea of his own concerning Mr. Long, having him thus shadowed.

Chick gave a low whistle of surprise when he saw Mr. Long turn into Lally's retreat, for he knew Lally to be a crook.

And when Mr. Long emerged, strange to say, Chick did not follow him, but waited for Lally to come out.

He did not have long to wait. He tracked Lally to a saloon near the Bowery.

Hastily assuming the character of a Bowery tough, he followed him in.

There were two other persons at the table where Lally was sitting, which was reeking with the beer that had been spilled upon it.

At the right sat a slim, natty-looking fellow, with a boyish face and innocent blue eyes. He was dressed in sporty fashion, and was addressed by his associates as the "Kid."

On his right was a heavily-built, beetle-browed, ruffianly fellow, whose bloated, purple face wore the hardened look of a criminal of the lowest type. This ruffian, with the form of a prize-fighter and the countenance of a

thief, was known to the police under various aliases, but his real name was Jack Worms.

The last of the trio, Lally himself, would have passed anywhere as a respectable business man. He was well dressed in clothes that were new and of fashionable cut; his face was grave with lines of thought upon the brow, and he avoided all questionable expressions or gestures.

Despite his exterior, however, Carl Lally was a much more dangerous criminal than either of his companions.

He made crime a study, was true to his associates, and had left behind him in nearly every city of the country a record for shrewdness and dexterity, which few of his class were able to approach.

He was fifty years of age, although he did not look more than thirty-five, and after having been concerned in hundreds of criminal transactions, had never seen the inside of a prison cell except on a trivial charge.

Chick staggered up to a nearby seat and ordered a glass of beer.

Meanwhile, Lally ordered a fresh supply of beer and lit a cigar.

His companions looked at him expectantly, and with undisguised impatience, as he quietly drank his beer and leaned back to puff reflectively at his cigar.

The party we have described were the only persons occupying the tables at the time.

They were seated at the far end of the long room, and the occasional thirsty pedestrian who entered the saloon, drank his beer and left without noticing their presence.

"Who is that man?" demanded Lally, at length, twitching his thumb toward the disguised detective, who lay with his head upon the table.

"Dunno," responded the Kid; "but he's used up all right."

"Who's used up?"—hic—cried the person spoken of, raising his head and exposing an inflamed countenance and bloodshot eyes; "I ain't used up if ye mean me, not by half a case."

He reached for his bottle with an unsteady hand, and turning out a glassful, threw it off with an air of triumph.

"I'm just a little sleepy, that's all," he cried with a drunken hiccough.

Worms laughed.

As they watched the stranger his head gradually dropped upon his arm, and his stertorous breathing soon told that he was asleep.

"What did his nobs have to offer?" asked the Kid, turning to Lally and speaking in a low tone.

"It is settled."

"How?"

"The stuff will be there."

"What will he give?"

"Five thou."

The Kid and Worms exchanged looks of dissatisfaction.

"It ain't enough, hanged if it is!" exclaimed Worms, striking the table with his huge fist.

"Eh?" cried the drunken man, starting and raising his head to stare at the others like a dazed owl. "What ain't enough?"

"You woke that fool!" growled Lally, in an aside Worms filled the man's glass and his own.

He was too great a toper to refuse the glass, and lapsed again into somnolence.

"Five thousand is a small sum, considerin'," mused the Kid.

"Do you know where you can pick up the same sum so easily?" demanded Lally. "If you do, I'm ready to throw up this job and go in with you."

"It don't look like fifty or sixty thousand," growled Worms. "One thing about it, the swag will be in our hands if we get it, and we can whack as we please."

Lally scowled.

"Nit," he exclaimed. "Any one who works with me must be square. If I agree to do the job for five cents, and some one else should make five millions by my action, I would turn over that same five to him without a kick."

"You're good, I guess," sneered Worms. "You can work the job yerself, and count Jack out. What do you think, Kid?"

Kid did not answer.

"It will be easy of accomplishment and with little risk," said Lally, after a short pause.

"What tools must we carry?" asked the Kid.

"A brace, a pair of nippers, a sectional drag and a few sticks of dynamite. Bring along the worst tools you have; we won't need to carry them away with us."

"Did you get molds for keys?"

"Yes; and a plan of the chambers."

"And the combination?"

"I have that, too."

"What is the plan?"

"We are to effect an entrance, open the safe with our keys, take out the package, and then blow the safe to pieces."

"To disguise our manner of work?"

"Of course."

"That won't fool the detectives; they'll tumble."

"Probably they will guess that the explosion was made to cover up traces, but they cannot be sure, and we will leave nothing by which they can trace the job to us."

"After we've got possession of the swag where are we to turn it over?"

"I will attend to that part."

"And so," Worms, who had remained silent and sullen during the above conversation, burst in, "we're to risk our lives and a long stretch in the pen just for half a minute's handlin' of a millionaire's fortune? We ain't even to have the satisfaction of thinkin' we're rich for a while. That's worse than getting away with a big pile and bein' did for it afterward."

"You will receive twelve hundred and fifty dollars," Lally replied. "I presume you do not doubt me?"

The ruffian frowned heavily, but was silent.

Lally continued:

"It is not as though we had spent months in planning the job, watched at all times and in all sorts of weather to study the habits of the custodians of this wealth, then spent our good cash for tools and necessary expenses. Everything is ready to our hand. Furthermore, we do not have to take the risk of negotiating the securities after we have them. There is no fear of being detected with the plunder upon us. I tell you there is a big difference, and we will be well paid for one night's work."

"I'm of his opinion," said the Kid, after a pause. "I'm

ready to do my part. A couple of thousand isn't to be sneered at, and, as Lally says, we can enjoy ourselves with it and needn't hide away from the cops and deny ourselves a good time out of fear of being pinched."

"And you?" said Lally, turning a sharp glance upon Worms.

"You know I always do as you say," growled the big ruffian. "I think it's throwing away a good thing to give up the swag after you've got it into your hands. But I'll leave it all to you."

"Then the matter is settled."

"What's settled?" cried the stranger, suddenly waking up.

"That we shall drink," said Worms, filling his glass. "Drink to our success."

"Here's to your success," cried the man, glancing around upon the trio of rascals.

"It is certain to come off to-morrow night?" said the Kid.

"Unless some unforeseen accident interposes. We must hold ourselves in readiness to act."

"You will be notified?"

"Yes; all arrangements have been made."

They clanked their glasses together, and then Lally, who was temperate at all times, arose to go.

"No. 14," he said. "You both know the place."

"What's fourteen?" demanded Chick, who had heard enough of the conversation that had taken place to understand the plot.

No one answered him, and he returned to his beer.

They soon left the saloon, and the detective did not remain very long after they had left.

CHAPTER IV.

NICK'S CLEVER GAME.

While Chick was accomplishing this brilliant piece of detective work, Nick was following Jenny Mills, who had left the office a few minutes later.

Her most intimate friend was Nell Calder, who lived near her own home. She had agreed to stop on her way to see her, and was bent in that direction when she met an acquaintance, and accompanied her in a different direction.

This chance meeting resulted in a strange manner for several of our characters.

It was late when Jenny separated from her friend, but as she was passing the house where Nell Calder resided, she saw a light in the latter's windows.

"She is still up," thought Jenny. "She will wonder why I didn't keep my appointment with her."

Jenny was nearly as familiar in her friend's abode as at her own home.

They had been intimate since their school days, and not a day passed without their meeting, or regarding the failure to do so as a strange event.

Accordingly, finding from the sounds that there were visitors in the sitting-room where the light was displayed, Jenny quietly opened the door of an apartment adjoining, and entered.

The room which she entered was dark; it was Nell's sleeping apartment, and had a door admitting to the sitting-room.

This door was partially ajar.

Jenny intended to learn what company was present—if any—and go quietly away should they turn out to be persons she did not know or care to meet.

She could hear the sound of a man's voice distinctly, and recognized the speaker.

It was Bob Matthews.

Jenny was stepping forward on tiptoe, intending to surprise them, when her own name was mentioned in a way that caused her to pause suddenly and the smile to leave her face.

"And you thought I was really serious in regard to Jen?" cried Matthews, with a callous laugh.

"How could I think anything else?" replied Nell Calder. "You have made her think so, too, poor girl."

The listener shuddered.

There was a spiteful accent in the speaker's tone that could not be mistaken.

"She is pretty," drawled Bob; "and, being in the office, I could scarcely fail to look to her for amusement."

"I know what that means with you," exclaimed the girl.

"I've my own opinions in regard to such matters. I feel at liberty to seek my pleasure wherever I can find it, and I will take any means to procure it, providing the game is worth the ammunition."

"And you think Jen is worth the ammunition, as you say?"

"Well, in a way," answered Bob in his detestable drawl, which caused a shiver to run through the form of the listener.

"Then why did you ask me to betray her in the manner I have done? I have grown to positively hate her, but this seems too bad."

"You'll know some time. It was rather a nice thing for you."

"Do you suppose I would do such a thing for money?" she exclaimed, scornfully. "And if your uncle should take it into his head to prosecute——"

"There is no danger of that. Even if he does you have only to repeat your story boldly. You will seem innocent whatever happens."

"It will ruin Jenny."

"You just said you hated her."

"And I do, but should hate to see her sent to prison."

"There is no danger of that."

"What will be done?"

"She will be discharged."

"Has the detective reported that she stole the bonds?"

A faint stir, a moan, and then the sound of a fall, caused the pair to exchange looks of fearful wonder.

"Somebody was listening!" cried Nell, in a shrill whisper, turning toward the door opening into the bedroom.

It required but an instant for Bob Matthews to dart into the room.

He returned as suddenly, bearing the insensible body of Jenny Mills in his arms.

"Quick!" he cried, "she has fainted."

Interested by hearing her own name mentioned, the poor girl had listened for a moment, and what she afterward heard made movement impossible.

Her mind was active, however, and so rapidly did facts

and circumstances flit through her brain, that the few seconds seemed like as many hours.

She was suspected of having stolen the missing bonds; she recollected that there had been a strangeness in the manner of Mr. Long and the others at the office toward her since they had been missed.

What had Nell done? Something that fixed the appearance of theft upon her; and Matthews, too, had turned against her and was plotting to have her discharged.

She remembered also that a strange man had followed her from the office the night before.

She would be arrested, perhaps; lose her situation, and be sent away in disgrace, at any rate. She could not disprove what was alleged against her, and the appearances were upon the side of the plotters.

As the full force of her situation rushed upon her mind, the poor girl uttered a cry of despair and fell fainting upon a chair which stood near her.

Nell ran out of the room in search of restoratives.

In another moment a quick step approached the door, while the sound of confused voices could be heard at a greater distance.

Then a figure appeared in the doorway.

It was Nick Carter.

At the same instant a number of witnesses rushed confusedly into the apartment.

"It is Jenny Mills," cried an elderly lady, "she has only fainted. Help me carry her into the next room."

But the detective interposed.

"Restore her here," he said, rather harshly.

"Who are you?" cried the lady.

"I am a detective."

The persons started and looked at each other.

Nell Calder shrank into a corner of the room.

For a moment no one spoke.

Then Mrs. Calder recovered herself and said:

"What do you want here? I don't understand it all, Nelly—where is Nelly?"

The girl was forced to come forward.

"It is easily explained," said Nick, as if he believed every word he was saying. "This young lady has robbed her employers of a large sum; I shall arrest her."

CHAPTER V.

NICK CARTER SHADOWED.

The detective's declaration concerning Jenny Mills struck the listeners with frightful surprise.

Even Nell Calder, who was in a certain sense prepared, trembled at the suddenness of the disclosure.

That the reader may understand why the detective should have brought matters to such a climax, we will give a brief explanation.

He had easily found the candy store described by Mr. Dalton's grandson.

Here lived Calder, a candy maker, with his family, and Nick soon learned that Nell Calder and Jenny were intimate friends.

He discovered, also, that there was an old grandmother in the family, now so infirm that she could not leave her room, but to whom the dress worn by Charlie's friend probably belonged.

He saw Nell, and found that her description tallied with that given by Mr. Dalton of his mysterious visitor.

This was sufficient for the detective to act upon, and he called upon Nell Calder.

It required but little attention to discern that the girl had some secret upon her mind.

She changed color and became nervous when the detective questioned her in regard to her intimacy with Jenny, and finally said that she had sold the stolen bonds to old Dalton under direction from her friend, Jenny Mills.

She pretended to be in ignorance as to the manner in which Jenny obtained the securities.

"Jenny coaxed me to sell them to Mr. Dalton," she said, "and I gave her the money. I don't know where she got the bonds. I asked her, but she wouldn't tell me."

"Did you give her the check?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know who cashed it?"

"No, sir."

Nell professed to believe that her friend had obtained the bonds in an innocent way, and carried the matter so well that almost any one who had no reason to suspect her, would have believed that she was really distressed on her friend's account.

She shed a large quantity of hypocritical tears for Jenny, and then suddenly appearing to think of her own situation, lamented her disgrace with an apparent sincerity.

Despite her manner, however, Nick was not fooled a particle.

He did not yet understand why Bob Matthews had planned Jenny Mills' disgrace, but he knew to a certainty that Jenny was perfectly innocent.

He suspected that there was a deeper game on foot. Therefore he wanted Mr. Long and Bob Matthews to believe they had fooled him.

That was why he accused Jenny Mills of the robbery.

It seemed a hard thing to do, but there was no way out of it.

Nell had no suggestion to offer as to the inducements for the theft.

She hinted, however, that Jenny's father was no very scrupulous character, and that the family were in distressed circumstances owing to his love for drink.

Jenny was slowly regaining consciousness under the ministrations of Mrs. Calder.

She sat up and gazed wonderingly upon the company.

As she remembered what she had overheard, the poor girl hid her face upon the arm of the sofa and burst into tears.

Mrs. Calder tried to soothe her.

Nell had slipped out of the room, unable to sustain the effects of her duplicity, while Bob Matthews sat uneasily in his chair, desiring to go and scarcely knowing how to do so.

Bob Matthews, who was more attached to Miss Mills than he was willing to admit to Nell, felt a thrill of real concern for her and shame for the part he had played.

He drew the detective aside.

"You do not really intend to arrest the girl?" asked Bob.

"I am not so particular about her just at present."

"You will do me a favor if you will release her," said Bob, concealing his fears beneath an assumption of dignity. "My uncle does not wish to press the case against the girl, and I am certain he would wish to be consulted before you go further."

Nick appeared to hesitate.

"What do you say?" urged Bob. "Let this matter rest for to-night. Come around in the morning and consult Mr. Matthews. I know he feels a kindness for the girl."

Nick gave what was apparently a reluctant assent.

Nick now left the room, well satisfied with his evening's work.

Turning in the direction of his office he was surprised to see Chick go shambling by in his disguise as a tough.

He knew better than to speak to him, and it was well he did not, for the next instant he saw a figure opposite, who was evidently following Chick.

After Lally had left the saloon his suspicions were somewhat aroused concerning the stranger who had sat near them.

The more he thought of it, the more they troubled him.

Finally he left his companions and went back.

When Chick came out a few minutes later Lally followed him.

It took Chick about two minutes to discover that the man was on his track. He saw Nick as he passed by, but gave no sign.

As he neared the building in which Nick's office was situated he performed one of those feats for which he was famous.

He gave his shadower the slip so completely that even Nick, who had followed some distance in the rear, would have been puzzled to know where he had disappeared to had he not known of the secret trapdoor at one side of the entrance.

Nick entered the building at another door and was soon closeted with his clever aide.

Chick's disclosures, which he quickly communicated to his chief, confirmed all of Nick's suspicions.

It was evident to both of them that there was a big scheme on foot.

As Chick finished, Nick suddenly turned out the light and sprang toward the window.

After a minute the dark shadow of a man flitted out of a doorway half a block away, and hastened up the street.

He stuck close to the buildings, which served to conceal him partially, and advanced at a swift, gliding pace.

It was now midnight, and owing to the rain pedestrians were infrequent.

The shadow observed exceeding caution.

He halted when some twenty yards down the street, and ensconced himself in a doorway.

There he waited.

"He's waiting for you, Chick," laughed Nick, although he realized that he had a shrewd rascal to deal with.

Telling Chick of his plans, Nick set about making up a disguise.

He did not wish to relight the gas and he had to be expeditious.

Five minutes later Nick was stepping noiselessly down the stairs again.

Was the man still upon the watch?

This Nick must first discover.

He wished to assume the *rôle* of shadow this time, but how could he accomplish his purpose unsuspected?

CHAPTER VI.

NICK MAKES HIS REPORT.

After standing in the stairway for a few minutes, an approaching cable car supplied the detective with an expedient.

When the car arrived in line between himself and the spy, Nick ran out and swung himself upon the platform.

He dropped off on the opposite side when the corner above was reached.

He was now upon the same side of the street as Lally, and looking back could see him, for he had stepped from his place of concealment and was advancing.

Nick in turn concealed himself in a doorway.

But Lally only came as far as the number where Nick's office was located.

He appeared to be peering up at the windows.

At last he gave up his attempt to locate the tough.

Nick watched him turn and walk off down the street.

He made no attempt at concealment now.

Nick easily approached within a proper distance of Lally, and kept him in view without difficulty.

The man was a good walker, and continued north, and finally entered the Grand Central Depot.

Nick had shortened the distance which separated them, as he discovered an intention on the man's part of coming to his destination, and he passed into the depot waiting-room at the fellow's heels.

Lally had quietly seated himself and began to read an evening paper which he took from his pocket.

There was a local train due to start in five or six minutes, and from appearances Lally seemed an intended passenger.

The detective was loath to take a night journey for the simple purpose of escorting him home.

Consequently he watched him upon the train, and returned to his office.

The first thing in the morning Nick sent his aide to the depot.

He intended to keep the flash crook under surveillance for a few days.

As soon as he could expect to find Long at his office he went to make his report.

He found that Long was already informed of what had occurred.

"Mr. Robert Matthews mentioned the matter to me," said Long, who was in his most dignified mood. "I desire you to be lenient, Mr. Carter."

Nick shrugged his shoulders.

"You would not make a weak display of leniency at the expense of thousands of dollars, I presume?" he replied.

"I do not understand you."

"I have evidence to convict Miss Mills of the theft."

Long started.

"Really?"

"Yes."

Nick detailed what is already known to the reader. He was playing a big game of bluff, and intended to go even further.

"That is not all," he added, in conclusion, "I have reason to believe that a greater robbery is being planned."

The color slowly faded out of Long's face. Nick had won his point.

"What do you mean?" he cried. "You surprise me."

The detective watched him curiously.

Just then the door opened and Bob Matthews entered. He glanced from the detective to Long and back again, as though in wonder what had been the subject of debate.

He shook hands with the detective, and took an early opportunity to whisper to Long's ear a single word:

"Beware!"

Long gave him a reassuring glance.

"I think we had best wait, Mr. Carter," said Long, turning to the detective. "Miss Mills will be allowed no more opportunities like the last, and we very seldom have any large amounts in the office, so the danger you fear is not likely to happen. By the way, have you yet discovered the man who cashed Mr. Dalton's check?"

"No."

"Can you do so?"

"The readiest way would be to force a confession from Miss Mills, or her father."

"But is there no other way?"

"I am in possession of his description. I can search the police records and run him down; but it will take time and will be expensive."

"Don't you think that would be the best way?" Long said, turning to Bob. "What is your uncle's opinion?"

"He won't listen to a word against the girl," was the prompt reply. "I was talking with him this morning."

There was not a word of truth in this assertion, and the detective knew that Bob was lying.

"Talking of checks," remarked Long, in his pleasantest manner, "reminds me that a check might be acceptable to you, Mr. Carter."

"No hurry about that," Nick replied. "I do not consider the case as settled yet."

"A large part of it is settled."

"Which?"

"That which concerns Miss Mills; we shall never prosecute her. One thing I would like to have you do—make a regular written report of the matter to me. I will then talk with Jenny and persuade her to confess the truth. In the meantime, you might look after the man who cashed the check."

Long handed the detective a slim piece of paper as he spoke, and the interview was ended.

"That is finished," Long remarked, as the door closed upon Nick. "He will make his report, and you will be satisfied. In the meantime, you owe me a hundred and sixty-three dollars and thirty cents."

"You have purchased the books, then?"

"Yes."

"And that is the expense of the invoice?"

"Exactly."

"Who pays?"

"Bob Matthews."

The two laughed.

Bob glanced through the glass door.

Jenny was at her desk.

She was extremely pale, and worked in a listless manner.

Bob sighed.

"I more than half regret what I have done," he said. "She made a discovery last night, and will barely speak to me."

"A discovery?"

"She overheard a conversation between the girl who sold the bonds to old Dalton and myself. I don't know how much she did learn, but enough to put her on her guard. I must have a talk with her and try to recover her good graces. Can't you do something with young Hanifran?"

"Yes; send him to me."

The two exchanged knowing winks, and Bob Matthews entered the next room for the purpose of talking to Jenny Mills.

She did not look up from her work, although a faint flush told that she recognized Bob's step.

"Long has something to say to you, Harry," Bob remarked.

The glass door opened and closed, and Bob Matthews was alone with his intended victim.

CHAPTER VII.

PREPARATION.

Hanifran was grave and subdued in manner when he entered Long's room.

He had held no conversation with him since that which we have related in a previous chapter.

That was the day he had promised to fulfill Mr. Long's singular request.

The latter smiled and pointed to a chair, but Harry did not sit down.

"I have made all arrangements," said Long. "Nothing is lacking but the securities for deposit."

"I have hoped you could manage without that," replied Harry, looking down.

"Impossible!"

There was a brief silence, during which interval Long gazed upon the downcast features of the young man, as though trying to read his inmost thoughts.

"Tell me exactly what you require," said Harry.

"Mr. Matthews will send you to the deposit company's vaults for certain papers. You will find there a parcel indorsed M. C. R. R. bonds; these you will bring with you and give them into the hands of Mr. Matthews. He will discover the mistake when it is too late to return them to the vaults. To-morrow I will remove them and say I sent them to a place of safe keeping."

"Will he believe that I made a mistake, think you, in bringing a large parcel of bonds for the papers I am sent for?"

"Why should he suspect anything? You will give the bonds into his hands, and he will lock them in the safe, to which you have neither the combination nor the key?"

"He may suspect you?"

"Of what?"

"Arranging this matter."

Long laughed.

"He will not be in possession of the clew you have," he remarked. "It would be the most natural thing in

the world for me to return the bonds to the bank if I should find them in the safe."

Hanifran was silent.

Long's plan seemed perfection in its simplicity.

"There is but one thing for you to guard against," he said, as Harry arose.

"And that?"

"Your expression."

"It will be impossible, perhaps, for me to control that under a fire of questions."

Long meditated.

At last he said:

"I will watch for your coming and be on hand to bring you off. One thing more, you must be sure not to return too early."

"So he cannot send me back with the bonds?"

"Yes."

This completed his instructions, and Hanifran left his tempter.

The remainder of that momentous day was the longest and most wearisome Harry had ever experienced.

It drew to a close at last, however, when late in the afternoon he was called to Mr. Matthews' private sanctum.

Hanifran trembled so violently that he had to pause outside the door to regain his composure.

"You will go to the vaults and bring me the Star Elevator Company's bonds," said Matthews.

Harry could not trust his voice to speak.

He took the keys from the old man's hand and got out of the room as soon as possible.

It was necessary for him to pass Long's room, and he found the door open.

Long motioned him to enter.

"Brace up," he said. "You are positively white."

"I shall be better when I have time to think," answered Harry.

"You've got your direction, then?"

"Yes."

Long looked at his watch.

"You had best take an hour in going and coming. You can say that you were detained if there is any question."

In the meantime, Nick was informed by Chick that Lally had returned to the city.

Chick had trailed him into a café and left him eating while he came to notify his superior.

This was what Nick had been waiting for, and everything was in readiness.

In ten minutes he had disguised himself so completely that it would have required a minute examination to detect it.

He hobbled down to the street as an old negro—not a stagy representative of the race, be it understood, but the exact fac-simile of an old darky.

He shuffled along with his cane upon the outer edge of the walk until he reached the café where Lally was eating.

Before long his quarry came out.

Lally appeared to be killing time.

He visited the post office, lounged into M'Coy's, where he wrote a letter, and passed away some time at billiards.

The detective hardly once lost sight of him during this interval, but could discover nothing suspicious in the rascal's manner.

However, when he left the billiard hall and started up the street, the shadow was on his track.

Lally walked briskly now, going north.

At length he turned down a side street, and soon afterward entered a hallway and disappeared.

The detective reached the spot so soon afterward that he could hear the cracksman ascending the stairs.

There was little about the place from which he could draw an inference as to the nature of the man's visit.

There was a physician's shingle upon one side of the stair, while the other carried a notice to the public that a justice of the peace could be found above.

The detective looked for the number.

It was No. 14.

This was the rendezvous Chick had heard mentioned in the saloon!

CHAPTER VIII.

TRAPPED!

Nearly an hour expired before anything occurred.

Then a man passed the detective, who had taken up his station within a few paces of the doorway, at sight of whom Nick suppressed a start.

His caution was unnecessary, however, for the man did not glance in the direction of the old darky.

This person was thirty or thirty-five years old, short in stature, with brown hair and mustache.

He had a broad scar, caused by a burn, upon his neck, which his shirt collar failed to conceal.

The man who had cashed the check given to Mary Somers—or Nell Calder—was described as having a similar scar.

The rest of the fellow's person tallied with the description given by the banker.

"If he goes into No. 14," said the detective to himself, "he is the fellow I want."

The man did enter the hallway of No. 14.

As he entered he cast a peculiar, furtive look over his shoulder, which spoke louder to the detective than any word he could have uttered.

The latest comer, who had indorsed his name upon the check as C. C. Henry, soon returned to the street.

Evidently the fellow had been successful in his mission, whatever it was, for he went off smoking a cigar and at a lively pace.

The old darky followed him; at first slowly, then at a brisk walk.

Just as he reached the bridge which crosses the railroad tracks on Park Avenue Nick overtook him.

The man turned a frightened countenance as he felt a hand upon his shoulder.

As he saw no one near him but an old negro, the blood rushed to his face.

"What the deuce do you mean?" he exclaimed angrily, his voice a little tremulous from his recent fright.

"Will you go with me?"

"Eh?" cried the man, starting in astonishment.

The detective repeated the question exactly.

"Well, I guess not," laughed the man, who regarded this request as a striking exhibition of impudence. "Are you afraid to go alone? Let go of my arm."

"You had better come quietly," said Nick, who had his own reasons for preventing a disturbance.

"Who are you?" the rascal demanded, growing uneasy again, as he found that the apparently feeble old man held him with a grip he could not easily break.

"A detective!"

Henry became pallid.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "But what do you want? I am an honest man."

"Possibly. If that is the case you will come with me readily. It will save you trouble."

The fellow tried to tear his arm free, but he was no match for Nick, who quickly marched him off to the nearest station house.

Nick then attempted to discover the occasion of his visit to No. 14, but the man refused to speak.

A search of his person failed to throw much light on that circumstance, although letters and cards that would identify him later were found.

The detective started for his office.

By the time he arrived there he had made up his mind to a course of action.

He would warn Mr. Matthews and keep as close a watch upon the plotters as possible.

Chick was waiting in the office.

The detective wrote a letter, and dispatched Chick to deliver it.

It was directed to Mr. Matthews.

Nick donned a fresh disguise, which was easily done, for he only washed the black from his face and inserted a strip of rubber between his upper lip and teeth. That gave him the appearance of an Irishman.

It was just nine o'clock when he reached the street again.

If Matthews wished to take any precautions he still had a chance to do so.

Nick returned to No. 14, where he resumed his watch.

It was still too early for the cracksmen to begin operations, if they really had a scheme in view.

Nick had accomplished one good purpose in capturing Henry, and he took up his watch with renewed patience.

It almost appeared that he was to look that night.

He had not been twenty minutes returned before Jack Worms appeared in the doorway leading up to No. 14.

He seemed to be searching for some one, as he looked all around.

Then he came directly up to the detective, who stood on the curbstone lighting a short pipe, and not six yards from the suspicious number.

Worms' sudden approach gave the detective a turn.

It required all his coolness to turn calmly around with a stare as the burglar touched him.

"Hey?" cried Worms, "want a job?"

"A job, is it?" returned the man, with a strong brogue. "Do Oi look as Oi wanted a job, wid me best duds on? Oi'm goin' home, man."

"But there's a couthing in it."

"How much?"

"A dollar."

"What is it, then?"

"Help me carry a box half a block up the alley."

"And is that all ye want?"

"That's all. But I'm in a hurry. Will you do it?"

"Sure an' I will."

Telling the pretended Irishman to follow him, Jack Worms started down the street at a rapid pace, with his assistant close at his heels.

Turning the corner, Worms never looked behind him until the last building on the block was reached.

Nick suspected a trap, but dared not back out.

He had let Chick know where he was going, so he felt free to fall into any plans his quarry might arrange for him, knowing that Chick would not long let him remain in their hands, if, indeed, it should be necessary to let them take him prisoner.

Then he glanced over his shoulder to say, "Come on," to his panting companion, and dived down the steps leading to the basement.

The basement seemed to have been disused for some time.

Worms took a key from his pocket.

The door did not appear to have been opened for a long time, for it required quite an effort for Worms to unlock it.

He succeeded at length, however, and passed inside.

The detective waited.

"I'll have a light in a minute," said Worms.

He lit a match, and then a lamp, which stood upon a strip of counter and was incrusted with dust.

"What in the devil are you standing there for?" exclaimed Worms, impatiently. "I'm in a hurry."

"Where's the box?"

The detective had been staring all around the room, seemingly in stupid curiosity.

There was not a sign of any living creature in the place except themselves.

Worms had gone behind the strip of counter.

"Here, old wooden head!" exclaimed the rascal, in reply to the Irishman's question. "Come round here and give me a lift."

He seemed to be dragging some heavy object out from beneath the counter.

When he went around the end of the counter, the Irishman saw a box about four feet square.

It was furnished with handles, but appeared to be very heavy, for Worms was tugging at it with all his strength.

"Now, be careful," cautioned Worms, "there's glass in it."

He lifted his end of the box easily, although it was very heavy.

"Easy now," cautioned Jack.

"Yis, sor, I——"

There was a swish; the detective let loose of the handle and tried to whirl around, for he realized that he was in for it.

He was too late, however.

Kid-O'Brien had stood behind a supporting post, half sunk into the wall at the end of the counter, which the detective, owing to the dim light, had failed to notice.

He was armed with a sandbag, and he struck the detective a tremendous blow on the head.

Nick tumbled over the box, and Jack Worms threw himself upon him.

It was quite useless, however.

The detective had been stunned by the blow, and lay perfectly still.

"Give me the cord, Kid," muttered Worms, "de bloke may come to life ag'in."

Kid obeyed, and Nick's hands were tied securely.

Then the two rascals laughed softly.

"That's as slick a job as I ever worked in me life," said Worms. "He, he, he!"

CHAPTER IX.

A LOSING GAME.

After they had chuckled a little longer over the "job" played at the detective's expense, Worms ripped the cover off the box.

The Kid assisted him in throwing out several large stones with which it was filled.

Then they lifted the unconscious detective and put him into it.

It was a tight fit, but by bending his legs and twisting his neck, they managed to get the cover on.

"He may smother in there," said the Kid, as his companion seized a nail and the hammer.

"Don't think it—he won't smother easy."

"But how'll he get out?"

"What do you care?"

"I'd hate to kill 'im."

"He'll get out all right," growled Worms, driving in the nail. "Soon enough fer us, you bet. If it warn't fer Carl, with his squeamish notions about killin', I'd put a knife into 'im."

"Not while I'm here," declared the Kid, with a shudder. "I draw the line at life. I don't think I could sleep easy after it."

Worms said nothing more, but contented himself with nailing on the cover so secure that it would be impossible for the detective to release himself.

"There," he exclaimed, when he had finished, "that's one thing out of our way. What a lucky thing it was you happened to be passing just as he dropped off the bridge after the guy that brought the message. Mebbe we'll hev to come back after ye, ole man," he continued, addressing the unconscious detective in the box. "If that chap he shot coughs up, his nobs will want Nick Carter killed. Here he'll find 'im cooped up like a chick."

"Who do you se'pose he is, anyhow?"

"Who?"

"Lally's pal."

"Ain't the least idee. Wot's more, I don't care."

Worms extinguished the light and, leaving it upon the counter, the pair crept toward the door.

The Kid slipped up the steps and vanished.

A moment later Worms followed him.

The basement was to all appearances as untenanted as before.

A few moments later the two crooks were climbing the stairs of No. 14.

In the meantime, Chick was delivering his message.

The millionaire's home was only a few blocks distant.

Matthews' wife had been some years dead.

He kept up the establishment, however, under the charge of a housekeeper, and Bob Matthews lived with him.

The old man required little relaxation.

He regularly took a drive after his early dinner, and passed the remainder of the evening in his library—as a small, dark room, full of old account books and musty papers, was called.

Chick was admitted, and, after he had waited a few minutes, was shown into the millionaire's presence.

Matthews looked just as he did at his office.

He was smoking a long and strong-smelling cigar, and a map was spread out upon the desk before which he sat.

He glared at the detective from under his bushy eyebrows.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"I came from Nick Carter, the detective."

"What does he want?"

"That letter will tell you."

Matthews tore open the envelope and rapidly perused the contents.

His scowl seemed to become accentuated; that was all the change observable.

"Do you know the contents of this?" he demanded, after a moment's thought.

"Yes, sir."

"Who are you?"

"A detective; my name is Chickering Carter."

"You are not a member of the police?"

"No."

"Will you accompany me?" asked Matthews.

"For what purpose?"

"That must remain a secret."

"Is it to follow out the directions given in Nick Carter's letter?"

"He gives no directions."

"Why, I suppose I can go," said Chick, after a moment's consideration; "but I should much prefer to know what is expected of me."

Matthews did not answer.

He pulled a bell; a servant appeared, and he ordered his carriage.

A few minutes later a man came to announce that the vehicle was waiting for him.

Matthews seized his hat, and, followed by Chick, quickly reached the carriage.

Picking up the lines, the millionaire drove rapidly cityward without uttering a word.

Chick was rather curious to know the secret of this sudden expedition, but he was forced to wait.

It was one o'clock of the same night, for the events detailed in the last chapter took place on a Saturday night, and the neighborhood of the Chamber of Commerce Building was nearly deserted.

A dark figure came swiftly down the street and disappeared in the portal.

He paused there for a moment and appeared to be listening, but not a sound disturbed the quiet of the beehive of offices.

He seemed familiar with his surroundings, and hastened up the stairs to the third floor.

Here he paused again upon the landing.

It was profoundly dark, but a sound, so faint that it was hardly distinguishable from the noises of the street, struck his ear.

He took something from his pocket and fastened it upon his face.

Then he advanced along the corridor.

The sounds became more distinct as he advanced, and suddenly there was an explosion.

It was not greater than that made by an ordinary firecracker, but the stranger halted and almost held his breath.

"They are there," he muttered, and went on.

He reached the door of Matthews' offices.

There were faint sounds inside, and the stranger uttered a low, peculiar whistle.

The sounds instantly ceased; the signal was repeated, and then the door was thrown open.

The stranger stepped into the room, which was perfectly dark, but as soon as the door closed the light of a dark lantern was thrown over the newcomer's person.

The mask of black silk entirely concealed his face, but the person who had admitted him seemed to recognize him.

"How did you happen to venture here?" he demanded, half in mockery.

"I became anxious; a great deal depends upon your success."

There were three men in the room beside the newcomer.

Each man was closely masked, but they bore in person a resemblance to Carl Lally and his two assistants, Kid O'Brien and Jack Worms.

The door of the huge safe had been blown open and the inside boxes torn to pieces.

Bundles of papers were scattered over the floor, as they were taken hastily from the safe.

The cracksmen had not yet made their selection.

Lally began to examine these papers, the newcomer standing over him.

There was an appearance of anxiety about the man, which grew stronger momentarily.

"We have been deceived," cried Lally, starting to his feet.

His pals uttered oaths of disgust.

The stranger seemed stupefied.

He looked at the three men for a moment in silence, probably suspecting that they had managed to secrete the anticipated plunder.

But he recollected that they had not had time.

Besides, his coming had been unexpected.

His eye roamed about the room restlessly.

It was the private office of Mr. Matthews.

The desk he occupied every day during business hours stood near the damaged safe.

His papers were all methodically arranged, but upon the desk lay a letter.

The stranger looked at the letter for a moment without appearing to notice it; then he suddenly picked it up and glanced at the address:

"William Matthews, — Madison Avenue."

The envelope bore no stamp or postmark.

It was, in fact, the note sent by Nick Carter to the millionaire.

Mr. Matthews had carelessly left it in his office.

The stranger took out the sheet of paper and read it.

Then he uttered a frightful oath, concentrating his disappointment, rage and despair in one burst of passion.

The robbers looked on in surprise.

"What is it?" cried Lally.

"The bonds have been removed."

"Removed—taken away?" cried three voices at once.

"What do you mean?" said the leader.

"Matthews has been warned, and came here to-night and took away the securities."

"How do you know?" cried Lally. "Does that letter——"

"Listen," interrupted the stranger.

He read aloud as follows:

"WILLIAM MATTHEWS, ESQ.:

"DEAR SIR: I write to warn you that a plot to rob you is on foot. If there is anything of value at your place of business you will do well to remove the same, or at least put an additional guard over it. I shall do what I can to prevent the contemplated robbery being successfully carried out, but I may fail. Yours, etc.,

"NICHOLAS CARTER."

The eyes of the rascals blazed behind their masks.

For a moment after the stranger had finished reading no one spoke.

Then the newcomer motioned with his hand for Lally to follow him into the adjoining room.

"You understand that letter?" he said, as he closed the door.

"I understand that Mr. Matthews has been here and taken the bonds."

"Yes, he has been here since nightfall."

"Yes."

"Accordingly the bonds are at his home."

"Probably," the robber assented.

"We must have those bonds."

Lally reflected, while the other stood watching him, his extreme anxiety evidenced in his trembling hand which rested upon the table.

"I don't see how we can manage it," said Lally, at last. "It is easy enough; I know the house and will accompany you."

"He may have concealed the securities."

"No; he will be satisfied in having removed them from the office."

"He will be on the watch."

"I tell you he will consider himself safe."

Still the cracksman hesitated.

"If we were sure the bonds were there," he said at last, "it would be different, but we may fail to find them. We have already made one attempt and lost; if I should consent my pals never would."

"You were to receive ten thousand dollars for the bonds."

"Yes; as it is we receive nothing for our trouble."

"You shall have double the sum if you make the attempt upon the house."

Lally laughed.

"No—no," he said. "Twenty thousand dollars is a fair promise, but we are not in luck to-night."

"I will give you five thousand dollars for making the attempt—whether you succeed or not."

"No."

"And twenty if the bonds are obtained."

"No."

The stranger seemed in despair.

He clinched his hands convulsively, and beads of sweat started upon his brow.

"We have no time to lose!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "I will give you ten thousand dollars in cash if you will accompany me to Matthews' house, and gain an entrance to its room. If the bonds are found I will give you twenty thousand dollars more. Surely that is sufficient."

"I will talk with the others," said Lally, after a pause.

He disappeared into the room where the men were, and the stranger heard a low-spoken, but warm argument.

He paced to and fro across the small room with unsteady step. Every now and then he listened as though to catch something that would tell him which way the decision was to go.

"It must be," he muttered as he at last heard Lally moving toward the door. "I must go alone if they will not. I have gone too far to stop now, for he knows enough to ruin me."

Lally came in, followed by his companions.

"Well?" cried the unknown, in a strange voice.

"We will go."

The stranger made a gesture of indescribable relief.

CHAPTER X.

ROBBERY AND MURDER.

It was three o'clock.

The family of Matthews, the millionaire, had long since retired to rest, and the mansion was closed and dark save for a light in the lower hall.

This indicated that Bob Matthews had not yet come in.

A man glided in from the street and skirting the edge of the stone walk, reached an area window upon the north side.

There was another dark shadow waiting there, and they exchanged low whispers.

Five minutes later two others came stealing along the yard from the rear.

The rear basement entrance on the window in a business like manner.

A pane of glass was cut out with a diamond; the catch securing the window was pulled back, and it was raised enough to admit the passage of their bodies.

One of the criminals remained outside upon the watch, the others dropped softly into the basement; the flickering light of a dark lantern was seen for an instant, then they disappeared up a stairway leading into the occupied portions of the mansion.

Passing through two or three rooms and passages, they paused before the door of the library.

A few moments' work by the skilled hands of the housebreakers, and the lock shot back in its wards.

The door was softly opened, and they passed inside one behind the other.

Mr. Matthews' sleeping-room opened from the library. The door of this room was open and the sounds told that the old man slept.

"That door must be closed," whispered one who seemed to be the leader.

Cautiously the mask was withdrawn from the lantern and a path to the bedroom door, which the robbers had discovered by the sounds of the sleeper, was outlined by a ray of pale light.

"I will close the door," said one of the trio in a low whisper, "and remain upon the watch in his room."

He left them, creeping toward the door, which was closed so softly that his companions, listening intently as they did, caught hardly a sound.

Then they swept the light around the small room.

Behind the chair usually occupied by the millionaire was the shining steel door of a safe, sunken in the wall.

As he looked at this door, Lally—for of course he was the leader of the gang—shook his head.

"This is no easy job," he muttered, "with the tools we've got and the old man in the next room."

The pair began operations immediately, however.

With remarkably little noise, and in a few minutes, they had stripped the outer plates from the safe, and the works were laid bare.

Then a fresh obstacle confronted them.

There were three compartments of steel, sunken in the iron frame in such a way that no lever could touch them.

"There must be keys," said Lally. "Signal to him."

Worms went over to the door, and tapped softly.

The unknown appeared.

He had a pistol in his hand, and his first glance was in the direction of the safe.

"Did you find them?" he whispered.

"The old man must have the keys to these drawers about him," said Lally.

"Yes."

"He has been quiet thus far?"

"He hasn't stirred."

"Where are the keys likely to be?"

"Probably in his clothes."

At a gesture from Lally, the stranger turned back toward the door of the sleeping-room which had been left ajar.

He was followed by Worms with the lantern.

In five minutes they returned.

The stranger displayed the keys triumphantly.

With hands trembling with excitement he unlocked the first door.

There was a mass of papers more or less valuable; but they were thrown down with a low exclamation of disappointment.

The second drawer was opened with the same result.

The nervous excitement of the stranger is impossible to describe, as he found that all depended upon a single compartment.

His hand trembled with such violence that he could scarcely insert the key in the lock, and after he had opened it he paused an instant as though to gain control of himself before he drew out the contents.

He did so at last, however.

Then he uttered an exclamation of delight.

"Saved!" he cried, hoarsely. "I have them!"

"Not so!" cried a stern voice.

There was the sound of a revolver as it cocked.

The rascals started violently and turned toward the bedroom door.

In the excitement of their search they had forgotten the close proximity of the man they were robbing.

He stood in the open doorway of his sleeping-room, clothed only in his night garments, and with a revolver grasped in his hand.

Matthews was cool and collected.

There was something in his composure which told that he had been watching the burglars and biding his time.

The revolver was leveled at the unknown rascal, who held the coveted bonds in his trembling hands.

"Ungrateful wretch!" Matthews cried, in a voice which caused the man to shrink back as though threatened by a blow. "You would rob me—you, whom I have raised from nothing—you, whose faults I have overlooked because I imagined they proceeded from weakness, not from a corrupt heart. Place those bonds back in the safe, leave the house with your infamous associates, and let me never see your face again, or I will kill you with as little regret as I should feel in the death of the most hardened criminal."

Worms and his companions moved toward the door by almost imperceptible degrees.

It was not so with the stranger, however; he hesitated for a moment, his hand stealing toward his hip pocket, where his pistol was placed.

Suddenly he threw the parcel upon the desk, turning as he did so as though intending to leave the room.

This move caused Matthews to relax his attention a little, which was what the robber was waiting for.

As he saw the barrel of the pistol lowered he leaped suddenly toward the old man and opened fire.

Matthews staggered; the first bullet struck him in the side, and before he could discharge his own weapon, Worms had seized the lantern, which had been out of his reach hitherto, and covered the light.

Matthews and the robber grappled in the darkness.

There were two more shots delivered at close range, a groan, and the unknown leaped for the coveted bonds.

In an instant he had secreted them in his pocket.

By this time Lally was running across the outer room toward the stairs by which they had reached the library, and Worms started to follow him.

The unknown detained him.

"Where is your light?" he exclaimed.

Worms thrust the lantern into his hand and disappeared.

The sounds of the pistol shots, the struggle and the running through the house had by this time aroused the inmates.

Doors slammed, the scuffle of feet, and excited shrieks, told that there would soon be witnesses upon the scene.

Nevertheless, the stranger did not flee.

He stooped over Mr. Matthews, throwing the light in his face.

He had been shot in the thigh by the first fire, and there was a terrible wound in his breast.

But he still breathed; his eyes unclosed as the murderer bent over him, and he attempted to call out.

The wretch seized him by the throat and, placing the barrel against his temple, sent a bullet into his brain.

Then he leaped into the bedroom just as a servant appeared at the library door.

The man even caught sight of the escaping wretch and sprang toward him, but the door was slammed in his face and locked.

"Stop—stop, some of you!" yelled the man, as he hastened to light the gas. "The murderer was just here! Quick, quick!"

He raised Mr. Matthews' head, but the first glance told that he was dead.

Laying him back again upon the floor, the man rushed against the bedroom door, striking with such force that the hinges shook.

Another effort and the door fell inward, and the servants rushed in as others appeared upon the outside.

The window was open and the murderers had escaped.

An attempt was made to trail the ruffians as soon as the police arrived, but without avail.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RESCUE.

Chick waited long into the night, after leaving Mr. Matthews, for Nick to return.

He well knew the dangerous character of Lally and his associates.

As the night wore on and Nick did not return, Chick started out to look for him.

He had seen Mr. Matthews deposit the bonds in his own safe at home and felt easy on that score.

As he hurried toward No. 14 he suddenly stopped and drew back.

Turning into a saloon a short distance ahead was Jack Worms.

Chick started on again and pushing open the half-closed door he went in.

There were two or three little groups at the bar, and at the far end were two persons who drew the detective's attention at once. One was Worms.

The crook sat upon a table smoking a cigar, and was talking to a villainous-looking fellow with a very red face and small, bloodshot eyes.

Judging from his inflamed countenance, Worms had been imbibing more than was good for him.

Chick worked his way slowly toward the pair, leaned at last against a pillar which supported the floor above.

Neither of the men observed his approach, and the pillar partially concealed him.

"Hang it!" Worms protested, "I can't do it. I haven't got the nerve; but I'll give you what I said."

"Ya-as; and if I'm nabbed?"

"There ain't no danger of that."

"There ain't, eh?"

"Naw."

"Then why don't you do it yourself and save your measly ten-spot?"

"I might be recognized."

"What difference would that make?"

"A good deal."

"I'll split the difference with you," said the fellow at last, "and blame me if it ain't more from friendship than anything else."

"No doubt," drawled Worms. "We won't quarrel about five plunks, anyhow."

"I'm to take the box to the lake and pitch it in?"

"Yes."

"What's in it?"

"If I should tell you you'd know—see?"

"Yes, I see. But it 'ud be easy fer me to find out."

"You can if you like; but I wouldn't open the box if I was you."

"Why?"

"Something might happen."

"Tain't no dynamite."

"Now," and Worms laughed. "But if you don't open the box you won't know what's inside and some time you might wish you didn't know about it."

"Well, hang what's inside, I don't care. Give us yer fifteen plunkers."

"You'll do the job to-night?"

"Yes."

"I shall depend upon your promise, and if you don't do as you agree, look out for Jack Worms."

"Hang Jack Worms," laughed the ruffian, as he pocketed the bills which Worms placed in his hand. "Let's have a drink."

He turned toward the bar, but Worms detained him.

"Wait a moment," he said. "This is a particular job unless it's done right. You know what you are to do."

"Yes, I'm to go to that store, get a box and take it out to the lake and drop it in."

"You needn't leave it on the bank where somebody will see it the next day."

"For another five I'll take it out in a boat and sink it in the bay."

"You're a regular grab-bug," growled Jack.

"I ain't gettin' as much as you are. But what about it?"

"I'll give the other five," said Worms. "Only do the thing right."

"You may depend upon me for that."

Worms passed over another bill and they went up to the bar, where they stood drinking, until the detective got tired of watching them and went up to the street.

He did not leave the vicinity, however.

Worms' tool came out after a while and walked down the street with a very unsteady step.

Worms still remained in the dive.

Chick sauntered after the man with the red face, and ultimately trailed him to a hotel in a poor part of the city.

From the appearance of the premises Chick concluded that he was an express driver or a cabman.

The former proved to be the case, as, after remaining in the hotel a few minutes, the fellow came out, and going to a rumble-down stable, reappeared after an interval with a bony horse and an express cart.

He drove slowly off, passed the detective, who had been lounging upon a box placed in front of a store, and walked slowly off in the same direction.

However, at the first saloon he approached, the ruffian was seized with an attack of drought.

Tying his horse in front of the saloon the man went inside and remained there until the detective came up.

Going in he found his man at the bar, and had no difficulty in making his acquaintance.

They discussed several drinks together.

Chick was a jolly sort of fellow and was soon upon excellent terms with Jeff Thornton, for such was the man's name, and when he turned to go accompanied him outside.

Chick finished up the story he was telling upon the walk.

"I can't stop any longer," Thornton declared. "I've got a trip to make clear to the other side of the city."

"West Side?"

"No, East Side. Why are you going over on the West Side?"

"I live over there."

This drew an invitation to ride, which the detective, as it was exactly what he had been seeking, took care to accept without any hesitation.

They climbed in and Jeff started his skinny horse at the fastest pace he was capable of making.

Chick kept up a continual fire of talk until Broadway was reached.

That was the point to which the detective had proposed to ride, stating that he would take a West Side cable car for home.

Jeff drew up without any suggestion from his companion.

Probably he thought he had accompanied him far enough.

"Here you are," he said.

The detective got down, and the two shook hands like old friends who were parting for a long period.

"Take care of yerself," said Chick.

Then Thornton drove slowly up the street, and the detective looked around for some means of following him.

"A bicycle would be just the thing," he muttered, as he noticed a bicycle outside a drug store.

He determined to take the machine at a venture and apologize afterward.

It required but a moment for the detective to break the chain, mount the machine, and scorch away up the street in pursuit of the expressman.

It was now nearly ten o'clock, and the pedestrians were becoming infrequent.

The detective had only lost sight of Thornton for a moment, and he soon came within easy distance of him.

Luckily the street was dark, and he rode behind the fellow at a speed that permitted little chance for observation.

The reader has probably guessed that the man's object was the basement wherein Nick had been trapped.

Leaving his cart at the curb, Thornton descended the steps, unlocked the door and disappeared.

"Shall I take him now or wait, with the chance of his giving me the slip?" muttered Chick.

He jumped from his wheel, and stole softly down the steps.

Thornton had already shouldered the box, and was mounting to the street.

The detective withdrew into the shadow.

He saw the box, which appeared to contain a considerable weight, thrown into the wagon.

Thornton leaped to his seat and drove off.

Chick determined to see the adventure to an end, and he mounted his wheel and started in pursuit.

The detective was close in the rear, and watched him turn down toward the river with feelings that are not easily described.

The fellow proceeded in a businesslike manner.

He backed his wagon up to a dock, and making a brief, ineffective search for a boat, prepared to cast the box into the water.

But the detective here called a halt.

He had reached the side of the wagon without being heard, and at the sound of his voice Thornton dropped

the end of the box which he had raised, and in the excitement of the momentary fear nearly leaped out upon the opposite side.

He almost immediately recovered his nerve, however, and also recognized the voice of the man who had spoken to him.

"What the deuce have you followed me down here for?" he demanded.

The detective leaped into the wagon before Thornton could prevent his doing so.

"You're trapped," he said quietly. "Submit without trouble; it will be best for you."

The expressman growled out an oath and aimed a blow at Chick, which, had it taken effect, would have knocked him into the river.

The next instant the detective had him covered with his revolver, and the ruffian was sensible enough to see his danger and submit.

The detective snapped the handcuffs on his wrists, and compelling him to resume his seat upon the driver's box, turned his attention to the mysterious load.

Worms had been in too great haste to leave the cellar after his attack upon Nick to secure the box from any attack from the outside.

Nick had not been able to free himself, because he had been weakened by the blows he had received, and was not able to exert himself in the confined space allowed him.

Chick pried off the cover with the heavy stock of the expressman's whip.

As he saw the body of a man, pallid, the detective uttered an exclamation of surprise.

Thornton, who had been watching him, jumped up in alarm.

"A dead body!" cried Chick. "This is more serious than I thought."

"I didn't know it," exclaimed Thornton. "You can bear me out in that."

"Don't be too sure of that," replied the detective, stooping to scrutinize the features of the body in the box.

Suddenly he leaped up with a yell that nearly made the listener's hair stand on end.

"Nick!" he exclaimed. "My God!"

An instant later and he had drawn the body from the box, tumbled the latter over the side of the wagon, and tenderly placed Nick's body at full length upon the straw in the bottom of the cart.

"If you make me any trouble," he cried, as he leaped upon the seat beside Thornton, "look out for yourself. I'm in no mood for nonsense, and have no time to lose."

He struck the horse with the whip, and drove up the street at a pace that ancient animal had scarcely ever known before.

CHAPTER XII.

WORMS.

Chick drove directly to the residence of a well-known surgeon, into whose house Nick was carried, and an examination into the extent and nature of his injuries instituted.

He was not dead.

But it required several hours' anxious work before he could be declared out of danger.

He was able to speak at last, however.

His consciousness, after being knocked down by the Kid, was very brief and confused.

He had recovered from his stupor to find himself inclosed in the box, which to his disordered sense appeared to be a grave.

He had struggled to raise the cover of the box, but in vain, and his exertion at last deprived him again of his senses.

Fortunately the box was not airtight, and he had continued in a more or less perfect comatose state until released by his assistant.

As he finished his account the detective sank into a quiet slumber, which continued until the following day was far advanced.

Chick had dismissed Thornton, after cautioning him to keep the singular discovery which had been made a secret from his employer Worms.

This the man promised to do, and was likely to keep his word, as he was in considerable fear of the consequences in regard to himself.

While Nick was asleep Chick learned of the terrible news of the robbery and murder of Mr. Matthews, and took the opportunity to run up to the house and look over the scene of the crime.

When Nick at last opened his eyes it became apparent that he had fully recovered the use of his faculties.

He immediately recognized Chick and held out his hand.

"How did it happen?" he asked.

Chick knew he wished to learn how he had been discovered and rescued, and told him the circumstances briefly.

"A few hours more would have done me up," said Nick, when he had concluded his relation.

He did not attempt to thank his friend, knowing that expressions of gratitude would not be acceptable. Chick now told him of the startling events that had occurred.

"Do you know anything of the whereabouts of Lally or his associates?" he inquired when Chick had finished.

"No; I saw Worms last night.

"Where?"

"In Billy Marks' saloon."

"What was he doing?"

"He was engaging Thornton to convey your box to the river."

"How did he appear?"

"He seemed perfectly easy. If he was engaged in that murder, he is confident that there is no clew left out."

"I think there can be no doubt of that. They first entered the office, and finding that the bonds had been removed, made their attempt upon the house."

Chick assented.

"They must have had an associate well acquainted with Mr. Matthews' habits and character. They were led by this man from the Chamber of Commerce to the Madison Avenue residence. They knew what they were in search of, and wanted nothing else."

"Who is that man?"

There was an interval of silence, during which Nick seemed to be meditating deeply.

At last he said:

"Was Bob Matthews in the house at the time of the burglary?"

"No. He came home about half an hour afterward."

"Have you talked with him?"

"Yes."

"What does he seem to think of the affair?"

"He takes it easily."

"Not particularly grieved."

"He is shocked; but it won't last long."

"Has not know if Long has been there?"

"Young Matthews said not."

"I wish you would find Carl Lally," said Nick, after another interval. "Learn where he lives; and if you can discover Worms and Kid O'Brien it will be a good thing."

"Will you be at the office to-night?"

"I will come at nine; and I have been thinking, as the crooks believe me to be dead, it is not necessary to disabuse them at present. I shall speak to the doctor, and nothing need be said by any one of my adventure."

Chick nodded and left the house.

The doctor came in soon after, and after cautioning him to keep the matter secret, Nick submitted himself again to his professional attentions, and afterward fell asleep and did not awaken until nearly the hour he had appointed to meet Chick.

The detective arose and dressed, finding himself nearly as well as he had been before encountering the machinations of Worms and his pals.

Chick had not been idle during the day.

He had discovered that Lally lived at Yonkers, some miles from the city; that he was married, or supposed to be, and pretended to be in business in the city.

"So he may be found at any time," said Chick.

He had learned nothing about Worms, but Kid O'Brien was said to have gone South.

"I have been telling people that you are in Chicago," said Chick, "and would be absent a week."

Nick smiled.

"That will give me time," he said.

He proceeded at once, with Chick's assistance, to prepare a careful disguise.

By the time it was completed the suburban train, to which he had shadowed Lally, was due, and he started to make it.

The trip to Yonkers was made without incident.

It was a small place, nearly all the property being in the hands of real estate speculators.

Only one person beside himself left the train at the station, and he started off immediately.

Leaving the depot platform, Nick found himself upon the regularly-laid main street.

Yonkers had electric lights, but they were not in order upon the night of the detective's visit, and the street was as dark as a pocket.

It was so late that the half dozen stores were closed.

The only light visible upon the main street came from the barroom of the hotel.

As he passed the door the detective looked in.

There were but two or three sleepy-looking men sitting about, but concluding that he could return later, Nick passed on.

He knew where Lally lived, and supposed he could find his house without difficulty, even in the darkness.

The plotter lived in a new frame residence three blocks below the hotel.

He was about halfway between the hotel and Lally's residence, and just opposite the remains of a disused tannery, when he encountered a man upon the walk.

Nick heard the fellow's steps only a few seconds before he came up to him, and guessed that he had but just stepped upon the walk.

The man appeared to be drunk.

He was talking to himself, and this is what the detective heard:

"They won't let me in on the play because I drink once in a while. I buy my own drinks, an' I don't give things away, drunk or sober, curse 'em! They know I'm in hard luck an' want to throw me over. But I know a thing or two, and some they never dream of. He said the Kid was comin' here to-night, an' if I can see 'im I'll put a flea in 'is ear."

Just at this juncture he staggered into the detective, who had understood enough of the above to guess at the fellow's meaning.

"Hello!" cried the man, with a drunken hiccough, as he recoiled. "What er ye doin'?"

"Taking a walk."

"Where ye goin'?"

"I don't know that it is any of your business."

"All right."

He staggered closer to the detective, and before the latter could guess at his intentions had thrown his arms around him.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Nick.

The ruffian did not answer, but tried to trip him.

He was a powerful fellow, and not so drunk but that he retained command of his muscles.

The detective succeeded in freeing his right hand and easily threw the assailant.

"Who the deuce are you?" Nick demanded.

"Billy, the Bum."

"A very pretty name."

"Ain't it?"

"What are you doing here?"

"Looking for a drink."

"In the tannery?"

"No, I hain't been in the tannery."

"You intended to rob me, then"

"No, I only intended to get the price of a drink."

The detective saw that he would gain nothing by questioning the man, and as he had gained his purpose, which was to fix his person and voice in his mind so that he would know him should occasion require, he gave him a small piece of money and started on.

Billy, the Bum, staggered down the street toward the lighted door of the hotel.

"So Kid O'Brien is expected here to-night," mused the detective, as he listened to the irregular sound of the bum's retreating footsteps. "He did not go South, it seems. Who expects him? Carl Lally?"

Nick stared reflectively at the dark, rotting sheds of the old tannery.

What had Billy, the Bum, been doing in their dark precincts?

There was a broken fence surrounding the premises and several boards reading:

"DANGEROUS!"

upon several posts, but the detective did not notice this in the darkness.

He found a gap in the fence and passed into the weed-grown yard.

The business of tanning skins had once been quite extensively carried on here, but had been discontinued for some years.

The detective imagined that Billy, the Bum, had been in the tannery, and he seemed to have overheard something in regard to the Kid's intentions.

Nick skirted the main building, and picking his way carefully over the fallen walls and piles of *débris*, came to a smaller building in the rear, which had been the office of the concern.

The walls were of brick, and built in such a substantial manner that they had resisted the inroads of decay and the attacks of mischievous urchins.

Just as he came within a few paces of this building, the detective heard a sound like the grating of a key in a rusty lock.

Then he heard a door open, and discovered, dark as the place was, the figure of some person step from the ruined building.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OLD TANNERY.

The detective noiselessly drew back until he rested against the wall of the building.

The man passed so close to him that he could have touched him had he reached out his hand.

He glided rather than walked toward the street, and as he stepped from out the shadows cast by the buildings, the detective saw that he was a tall man, wearing a cloak, which covered him from head to foot, and a wide-brimmed slouch hat.

As the dark figure flitted away Nick stole after him, but he did not go far.

The stranger paused when he had reached the fence, and leaning upon it, remained there for some time perfectly quiet.

Evidently he was waiting for some one, and the detective concluded to seize the opportunity furnished by his absence to investigate the old office of the tannery.

He knew that the man had not locked the door behind him, and it was likely that he intended to return.

The door was only partially closed.

The detective pushed it a little further open and slipped in.

There was no light, and the place was profoundly silent.

He felt his way about the room.

There were several windows, but they were closely boarded up.

He discovered a broken flight of stairs leading to a half story above, a table and a few chairs.

These last were evidence that the place was occasionally used.

As he went around the room with great care his investigations took up some time, and before he had entirely completed them his quick ear detected the approach of some person outside.

He had barely time to steal up the shaky steps when the door was thrust open and some one entered.

The newcomer closed the door behind him and struck a match.

Nick was stretched out upon the floor above.

Stealing a glance at the stranger, he recognized the shrouded figure he had watched leaving the building a quarter of an hour before.

The man had lighted a lamp, but he still wore his cloak and hat, although he had drawn one of the chairs up to the table, and his back being toward the detective, Nick could not see his face.

He took a bundle of papers from his pocket and began studying them.

As well as the detective could judge, they seemed to be plans or diagrams.

Half an hour passed.

The stranger continued to study his papers with occasional intervals of reflection.

The detective was puzzled.

Was this person Carl Lally?

He could not tell. Their figures were similar; this man seemed slimmer, but his cloak would account for that.

Suddenly the man hastily gathered up his papers, and thrusting them into his pocket, extinguished the light.

He had heard the sound of some person approaching outside.

He came plunging up to the door and delivered a shower of blows upon it.

The door was unlocked after a brief parley.

When the lamp was relighted, Nick recognized both men.

They were Lally and his pal, Kid O'Brien.

"What made you so late?" grumbled Lally. "You ought to have been here an hour ago."

"I met Billy, the Bum."

"The drunken fool!" Lally exclaimed. "He found me out and came to demand money."

"So I guessed from what he said. Were you safe in refusing him?"

"I've no use for him."

"But he threatens hard."

"He can't injure me."

"Are you sure? From what he said I imagine that he knew something about an affair of yours."

Lally looked thoughtful.

"I don't know what it can be," he said after a short pause, "I have had nothing to do with him in years—not since he was sent up for that little job out in Indiana."

"Well, it's no affair of mine," and the speaker threw himself into a seat and drew out a cigar. "Haven't you anything to drink about your joint—this is a devilish queer outfit."

"It's safe," Lally answered. "We'll drink after a little. I want to talk business now."

"What is the business?"

"I know where those two hundred thousand dollars' worth of railroad bonds are hidden."

"Hidden?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean by that?"

Lally grinned.

"I know where to lay my hands on the bonds," he said. "We would have to dispose of them at a sacrifice, but even then we would get a big thing."

"Where are the bonds?"

Lally pulled out his papers.

"Great scott!" exclaimed O'Brien. "You know I always love the details to you. Who will be with us?"

"No one."

"Just we two?"

"Yes."

"Can we do it?"

"I think so."

The Kid shook his head dubiously.

"I'm not so sure about that," he said. "Curse it all," he continued in a shrill whisper, as he leaned toward his leader, "that was——"

The conclusion of his speech was lost to the listener.

"It was bad," assented Lally, "but we couldn't help it."

"I ain't felt right since," said O'Brien.

"Well, this matter I am talking about now will help us out of the country. I'd like to take a trip to Europe."

"Here too," said the Kid, brightening up. "When do you want to do the job?"

"Immediately; the sooner the better."

"Where is the swag?"

"In the city."

"You must have your plans all laid."

"I have."

"Who has the bonds?"

Lally leaned forward and uttered some name in a whisper.

The name was uttered in a tone too low to reach the detective, but the effect upon O'Brien was singular.

He gave a great start, stared at his companion for a moment, and then burst into a loud laugh.

"What a go that'll be!" he cried. "But are you sure you can manage it? He will be on his guard."

"Here is my plan," said Lally, after a short pause. "I have learned that to-morrow night or the night after, if he fails to find fitting opportunity, this man will go to a certain house here in Yonkers for the purpose of meeting a Jew, who has agreed to take the bonds off his hands and dispose of them in London or Paris. I propose to meet him on his way there, coax or threaten him until he accompanies me to a house I have engaged, and where you will be waiting. The rest will be easy."

"We will have to overpower him."

"A revolver directed at his head will make him deliver."

"He's got plenty of nerve," muttered the Kid, shaking his head gravely. "What are we to do with him after we secure the swag, grounding we are lucky enough to get it?"

"Leave him where we catch him; he will get out of it all right."

"Too soon for us, perhaps."

"He would not dare make a complaint for his own sake."

"Where is Worms?" asked the Kid, after a short pause.

"I don't know and I don't care to know; he is dangerous."

"How?"

"On Nick Carter's account."

"What do you suppose became of Carter?"

"Died."

"And the body—it has been removed?"

"I imagine Worms disposed of that."

Lally produced a bottle of liquor.

The Kid gulped down a glassful, after staring for a moment at his companion in an anxious manner.

"That is the first killing I was ever concerned in," he said, hoarsely. "I don't like it, and if you and Worms both hadn't sworn there should be no work of that kind, you might have gone to the dickens before I would have helped you out. Worms really had it in for the detective, and I might have known better than to have trusted him."

"Perhaps it's just as well that he's out of the way," said Lally. "He suspected us, and he is like a bloodhound, when once upon a scent, he never gives up the trail until he has followed it to the end."

An interval of silence followed this last speech.

The men sat smoking their cigars, and the detective from his point of vantage was gazing at them, when he suddenly became aware that he was not alone in the upper room.

Something was creeping toward him in the darkness, and as he abruptly discovered the fact, it required all Nick's iron nerve to prevent an exclamation of alarm escaping him.

He crouched close to the floor and lay perfectly still.

The interloper was creeping forward with exceeding caution, inch by inch, with the intention, no doubt, of taking a position from whence he could look into the room below.

The detective was directly in the line of his advance, and it was impossible that he should not discover him.

He drew his revolver and awaited his approach.

Nearer, and still nearer, the man came, until Nick could feel his breath upon his cheek.

Then he suddenly seized him by the throat.

"Quiet!" he hissed. "If you value your life!"

It was impossible for the newcomer to obey this command.

He did not speak, for the fingers clutching his windpipe effectually shut off his voice; but he gave a great bound, and strove to tear himself free from the suffocating grip.

He seized the detective in his turn, and a confused struggle commenced.

The plotters started to their feet in alarm, and the light was instantly extinguished.

Nick's antagonist was a powerful fellow, and the detective could use but one hand, his left being occupied with the revolver, which he hesitated about using.

He had the advantage given him by his antagonist's surprise, and he retained the grasp upon the other's throat, which was slowly but surely depriving him of strength and sensibility.

Nick was underneath and being forced closer and closer to the opening in the floor.

Lally and his accomplice seemed confused by the singular hubbub over their heads.

They stood still and awaited the result.

It soon came.

The detective found himself slipping through the trap, and, dropping his weapon, tore the stranger's grip free and, putting out all his strength, tumbled him down the stairs upon the astounded crooks.

The fellow crashed to the floor below, taking a large portion of the rotten stairway with him, and Nick arose quietly to his feet.

How had the man effected an entrance?

Stepping noiselessly to the side of the attic at which the man had first appeared, he discovered that he had slipped a board in the roof and crawled through the aperture.

Evidently he had intended to spy upon the plotters, and the attention with which Nick had been listening to the conversation taking place below him had prevented his discovering the fellow's entrance.

Grasping the roof-boards, Nick drew himself up just as confused sounds below told that the spy had been seized upon by the confederates.

Nick waited long enough to learn that his late antagonist had been overpowered by the conspirators, then he dropped to the ground and hastened away from the vicinity of the tannery.

He was able to make a pretty shrewd guess as to the identity of the interloper.

The man was Billy, the Bum, most probably.

The ruffian had been on the lookout for O'Brien, and had presumably followed him to the tannery.

The detective decided that he would not remain in Yonkers that night.

He had obtained a valuable pointer and would not risk discovery.

Nick went back to the depot and was soon back to the city.

Upon his arrival he proceeded at once to his office, where he found an important note from Chick awaiting him.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHICK'S DISCOVERIES.

"9.30 P. M.

"I have been following out the hint you gave me in regard to the employees at Mr. Matthews' office.

"There is a clerk named Harry Hanifran; he is twenty years old and respectably connected. He has some cause of dislike toward Mr. Matthews, but what it was I have not yet discovered. He is said to be engaged to George Long's daughter, and is familiar with Long.

"I met him by accident this afternoon, and started out to shadow him. He was with another young fellow, and they seemed out for a good time. I followed them about until about eight o'clock, when their course terminated at Charlie Duffy's place on Fourteenth Street. The young men were both pretty far gone by this time, and it happened that Long himself was engaged in a quiet game in an inner room. How he tumbled to the fact that Hanifran was in the place I don't know, but one of the helpers called him away from the roulette table, and he accompanied him to another room where Long awaited him.

"I followed Hanifran and the fellow and got into the adjoining room. There was a transom and a keyhole—this was enough for me, and I overheard nearly everything that was said. The conversation began by Long taking the young fellow to task for getting drunk, to which he pleaded a fit of the blues, and suggested that he—Long—knew the occasion of his unpleasant frame of mind. Then he began to lament in a maudlin way some 'terrible thing' that had happened of which he accused Long and himself. Long declared that he was not to blame, that Hanifran was mistaken in his conjectures.

"I listened for something definite, but they both seemed to avoid, as though by mutual consent, a direct explanation. It was something connected with the millionaire's assassination, I am sure of that. Long was afraid that the young man would give him away while drunk, and forced a promise from him not to drink any more and to go directly home. Hanifran knows something important, and it will be easy enough to pump it out of him when an opportunity offers.

"Long was so fearful that he went down to the street with the young fellow and saw him into a cab. Of course this put an end to my work for the time being. I am confident that a large amount of plunder was taken from the old man's safe, that Long intended to get it into his possession, but he was either forestalled by the crooks, or forced to commit burglary and murder to effect his purpose. Hanifran had a finger in the manager's plot, but he seems to have been merely a stall, and can be worked to make a confession.

"I am going to keep an eye on him, and will try to see you to-morrow. CHICK."

The detective read this letter carefully, and sat for some minutes buried in deep meditation.

It was now nearly daylight, and the detective threw himself upon a lounge to catch a few hours' sleep.

At a rather early hour the following morning Chick appeared at the office, and the two detectives held a long conference together.

Chick had learned nothing more than was stated in his letter.

He could merely comment upon the manner and tone of the persons upon whom he had spied.

"Hanifran was excited," he said, "and was unable to control himself much. He declared that he had commenced to drink because he could not bear his own thoughts. He talked with much emotion, although he seemed afraid to speak out plainly."

"You think that Hanifran had no concern in the affair?"

"Not intentional, I'm sure."

"It might be well to hang a bluff on him."

"Hanifran?"

"Yes; do you think it will work?"

"I think so."

"Then you had better see him to-day—the earlier the better, only caution him to keep his own counsel."

"He may seek to warn Long that he may have a chance to escape—providing he is really guilty of anything."

"You can say that Long is closely watched, and the first intimation that he has been warned will be a signal for his arrest."

"Suppose he will tell me nothing?"

"Then we are where we are now."

"Not quite; he might inform Long, you know."

"True; well, we must take our chance of that. You might say to him that Long is suspected; frighten him on his own account. You will be able to manage it, I know."

With these instructions Chick left the office to find Hanifran.

He had a long talk with him, following out Nick's scheme in every particular.

When Chick told him how Miss Mills was under suspicion for a recent theft, Hanifran showed genuine surprise.

When Chick had gone the unhappy young man threw himself upon his bed, overpowered by anxiety and despair.

He realized that Long was ruined; but he still refused to believe him guilty of the murder and robbery.

There must be a terrible mistake somewhere.

Long had intended to use the bonds, but he had been intercepted by the ruffians who had committed the murder.

That was what Hanifran thought.

But in reality, as the reader has seen, Long intended all the time to steal the bonds.

How they had obtained information in regard to the securities, Harry could not figure out to his satisfaction, but he was certain that his friend had had nothing to do with it.

In the meantime, Nick had disguised himself and taken the train for Yonkers which reaches that pleasant suburb at eight o'clock, or thereabouts, in the evening.

Chick was to follow him upon the next train, and was in the meantime pursuing a clew in relation to Jack Worms.

Worms had, in some way unknown to the detectives, dropped on the fact that Lally and the Kid were arranging a deal in which he was not asked to take a hand.

Perhaps he had been warned by Billy, the Bum.

At any rate, he had filled up and started out in search of Kid O'Brien, the latter being the easiest of the pair to handle and the readiest to find.

He made a round of the saloons and dives frequented by crooks of his order, and attracted so much notice that Nick heard of it.

Chick was provided with a warrant for his arrest, and dispatched in company with a policeman to look him up.

Luck, more than anything else, favored the ruffian during the afternoon and the earlier part of the evening, but the detectives at last got upon his trail.

He was reported to have gone to a house located on West Street, in company with a party of both sexes.

This proved to be the case and Chick had no trouble in running him in, though he had to act quickly in slipping the bracelets on him to prevent a violent struggle.

Chick hastened to the depot, not far distant, just in time to catch the train for Yonkers.

We will precede him, to follow in Nick's footsteps.

He had reached Yonkers disguised as a commercial traveler, and had taken up his headquarters at the hotel.

It was possible that the transaction he was interested in would not take place until the subsequent night, and he must make preparations to remain if necessary.

Purchasing a cigar, as it was still early in the evening, the detective sauntered out upon the street.

Nearly all of the denizens of the suburb seemed to be upon the street, but none of the conspirators were among the throng.

However, he chanced to discover the individual whom he guessed to be the person mentioned by Lally as the destined disposer of the stolen securities.

This was a sharp-looking Jew, about thirty-five or forty years old, and one of the principal owners of real estate and promoters of the suburb.

He owned a big double store near the hotel, and as the detective was lounging about, he happened to drop inside, where he overheard a conversation that convinced him of the man's identity with the mysterious person spoken of by Carl Lally.

The two men were leaning upon a showcase standing upon a counter near the door.

The Jew's back was toward the street, and he did not observe the detective.

After a single glance in his direction the other man gave no further heed to his presence.

"Then your absence is indefinite?" said the second person.

"Yes, I may be back in a month or six weeks, and it may be six months. I can't tell."

"You've got a trusty partner in your brother."

"Yes, Isaac will look after business as well as I could."

"And you really go to-night?"

"Yes; two-thirty the train leaves."

"I have a little business to transact with you before you go."

"You'll have to begin pretty soon then. What is it?"

"The contracts of the Lots' brothers."

"Will it take long?"

"An hour or so."

The Hebrew glanced at his watch.

"It wants ten minutes of nine. I will give you until half after nine," said he. "I have business that will occupy me for some time after that, and, by the way, are you going to want to use your horse to-night?"

"No."

"I would like to drive it."

"Well."

"Can you order your man to bring it around at half-past nine? Or you might drive up to my house and leave it there."

This proposition was agreed to and the men parted, the Jew remaining in his store, while the other hustled up the street to an office he had a few doors away.

The detective dropped out of the doorway and returned to the hotel.

He had learned two points by the conversation he had overheard.

The meeting of which Carl Lally had spoken was to take place that night, and was farther off than an easy walking distance from the Jew's store.

How should he—the detective—reach the place of meeting in time to prevent the intentions of the cracksmen?

Lally and Kid O'Brien had appointed to meet at the old tannery.

Providing they had not changed their plans after he had been forced by the unexpected appearance of Billy, the Bum, to take a hasty departure, they might be expected to have some conveyance at hand.

Nick, after some meditation, resolved to trust to this chance, and he quietly pursued his way to the old tannery.

The detective had appointed Chick to meet him at the tannery, and a set of signals had been arranged.

It now seemed probable that he would have to secure the criminals without assistance from any one.

The attempt was risky, as he had not only Lally and his accomplice to deal with, but there was an unknown quantity in the plotter of the quarter-million robbery.

Nick made his way silently to the office of the old tannery.

There was no light, and he satisfied himself by listening that there was no one inside.

It was yet rather early for Lally or Kid O'Brien to appear upon the scene, and the detective had time to make his arrangements.

It was his plan to shadow the cracksmen to the spot where they had intended to meet their associate.

When he saw the coveted valuables in sight it would be his cue to spring forward and capture the robbers and the spoils.

Half an hour passed.

At last he heard a faint sound, which his attentive ear told him was the fall of a human foot.

The man passed within ten feet of him and rapped lightly and in a peculiar manner upon the door.

He waited for a moment, and then repeated his call.

But there was no response.

There was a momentary silence.

Then Nick heard the stranger step down from the door and seat himself upon the step.

"This is interesting," muttered the man in tones which made it scarcely above an ill-natured whisper. "I dasn't even smoke."

For an interval there was silence after this.

It was broken at last by the rapid step of a person coming from the road.

This man came directly up to the office.

"Hello!" he said in a guarded tone. "This you, Kid."

The man upon the steps got up with a growl.

"What the deuce do you mean by coming up like a copper with his star on, after you cautioned me not to make a noise under any conditions? Here I've been a-sitting for the last hour, scarcely daring to move and wanting to smoke."

Lally, for the last comer was the rogue, laughed softly.

"We're in sight of success," he said.

"Has he come?"

"Yes."

"Do you think we can trust Mother Matt?"

"If she's well watched."

"Where is the Jew?"

"I saw him downtown a few moments ago."

Lally was unlocking the door.

"Wait a moment," he said. "There are some things in here I want."

He went inside and closed the door after him, his associate remaining upon the step.

When he returned they started for the road without further conversation.

The detective followed them silently.

The two rascals walked boldly along the highway for nearly a mile.

Suddenly the men halted. They were before a gate admitting them to a lane.

Nick knew nothing of the place, and he watched the men open the gate and advance up the lane without any fear of their escaping him.

From what he had overheard, it appeared that the transfer of the stolen securities was to take place in the house.

He saw the door at the side of the house open noiselessly, a faint and almost imperceptible light appear, and watched the two crooks glide past the door, which was held just wide enough to permit their ingress, without an attempt to prevent their disappearance from his view.

As the door was closed the light disappeared and all was silent as before.

Another period of waiting followed.

Nearly an hour passed in this manner.

At length he heard the swift pace of a horse, and the sounds of accompanying wheels, along the road.

The vehicle halted at the gate, which was opened by the driver, who proceeded to lead his rig up the lane and secured the horse to a tree some distance beyond where the detective crouched.

After similar formalities which had preceded the admission of Lally and his companion, the newcomer followed them into the house.

In the glimpse which he caught of his person as he slipped in, Nick recognized the Jew.

They were coming fast now.

Some other person came up the lane before the Jew had fairly got out of sight.

If the others had been cautious in their movements this man was doubly so.

He stole up the lane like a cat, and had not the detective been upon the watch he would not have observed his coming.

Nick's tree, as we may call it, was nearly in front of the entrance to the house.

The latest comer reached the tree trunk and halted.

The detective was upon the other side.

He could hear the man's labored breathing; he seemed nearly exhausted, and struggled vainly to suppress the sounds.

Apparently he had been running, and this circumstance prevented his discovering that he was not alone beneath the tree.

A very few seconds had elapsed, and the detective was revolving some method in his mind by which he could capture the man or escape before he noticed his presence, when the canter of a horse became audible.

These sounds did not come from the direction of Yonkers, but from the north.

The man on horseback paused at the gate.

He did not seem to be quite familiar with his surroundings, for there was a short pause and some hesitancy before he opened the gate and led his animal up the lane.

He did so at last, however, and hitched him to an iron at the side of the porch.

After the former preliminaries, he was admitted to the house, which by this time contained so many of the characters of our tale.

The time had now arrived for the detective to begin his operations.

The man upon the opposite side of the tree had dropped

upon the ground as the horseman passed, and had stilled his breathing.

Nick was so close to him that he could locate him, however.

It was a desperate chance, and detection was as likely as otherwise, but he determined to get the interloper out of the way, so that he could not interfere with his plans.

The sounds of a struggle, should there be one, must alarm those within the house, but nothing could be done with the man where he was.

Nick drew his revolver silently, and stepping suddenly around the tree, threw himself upon him.

The fellow was taken entirely by surprise.

But Nick's surprise was still greater, for the next instant he recognized the man as his assistant, Chick.

CHAPTER XV.

BALANCING ACCOUNTS.

Nick leaped to his feet and assisted Chick to arise.

"I didn't know you," he whispered cautiously. "I might have guessed, too, but I had an idea you were some rascal who had split with our friends in the house. Why didn't you speak?"

"I'm not hurt much, I guess," Chick answered, shaking himself and arranging his clothes. "I wouldn't have yelled for help if you'd killed me. But, are they all in the house?"

"Yes."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Remain here until I come back, and keep a watch upon the windows for the show of a light. I must first learn if possible where the men are."

He stole noiselessly up to the nearest window.

It was strongly protected by a heavy shutter, which made it impossible for him to see or hear anything that might be passing within.

He examined several other windows with the same result, and then began a circuit of the building.

Upon the north side he noticed a window with a damaged shutter.

It was upon the second floor and the room was unlighted.

The detective examined the situation carefully.

It would be possible for him to reach this window from the branches of a tree, which nearly swept it.

He hastened back to the spot where he had left his companion, and the pair were under the window a few moments later.

"Let me get inside before you ascend," said Nick. "Keep a close lookout and signal if anything happens."

He then seized the trunk of the tree and ascended to the first branches with perfect ease.

He was soon on a line with the window and climbing out upon the largest of the branches swinging in that direction, grasped the window sill and perched himself upon it.

The window was closed, but he was prepared to open it, and deftly cutting out a pane of glass, unfastened the catch, raised the window softly and crawled into the room.

As Chick saw him enter he began to ascend the tree.

The room in which the detective found himself appeared to be empty of all furniture.

He found the door, and fortune favored him for once, as it was not locked.

By the time he had opened it and discovered that a narrow corridor led toward the front of the building Chick stood beside him.

They went out in the hall and paused to listen.

They could hear something like the sound of voices, and Nick led the way in the direction from whence it came.

There was no light perceptible from the head of the stairs.

Nick drew his revolver and prepared to descend.

The stairs were heavily carpeted, as was the corridor above, which deadened the sound of their footsteps.

They reached the lower floor.

Upon the right-hand side of the staircase were two doors, and at the end of the hall was a third.

The doors were all tightly closed; but the room farthest from the street and the one at the end of the hall were occupied.

Through the keyhole and about the casing appeared small streams of light.

By a pressure upon his arm Nick directed his companion to remain stationary.

He slipped up to the door nearest at hand.

By listening intently, he could detect the voice of some person; but try as he might, he could see nothing of the interior distinctly, although there was no guard upon the keyhole.

Nick passed on to the next door.

This room was dark; but as he bent his head to listen, Nick distinctly caught the creak of a chair and a whispered ejaculation.

Satisfying himself that the person, or persons, whoever they might be, within this room were without a light, the detective went on to the third.

The lamp which gave light to this room was placed upon a table directly in front of the door.

He could perceive two persons seated at the table, apparently examining something, although not distinctly enough to recognize them, or perceive what they were doing.

After standing there watching the operations of the two shadows for a few minutes, the detective concluded that they were the plotter and his intended agent, the Jew.

By a natural inference he supposed that those he had heard in the dark room were Carl Lally and his accomplice, upon the watch to spring upon their intended prey at a fitting opportunity.

If the persons within the room were the mysterious plotter of the quarter-million burglary, and the Jew of Yonkers, they had nearly completed their business.

There was a leather valise, or something of that sort, upon the table, and one of the pair began to place his papers within it.

The detective watched him lock it carefully, take a package of cigars from his pocket, offer one to his opposite companion, light another, and then arise, buttoning up his coat.

The interview was at an end.

If the crooks were watching, now was the time for them to make a move.

Swiftly, but with the stealth of a cat, Nick drew back to the side of his assistant.

"They are on the move," he whispered; "come out of sight."

They crept back up the stairs until they were completely concealed.

The door of the darkened room opened and two men crept noiselessly out.

Leaning forward, the detective could distinguish their figures and that they were masked.

In an instant they were hidden by the projection of the staircase, but it was probable that they had taken a position near the door behind which their intended victims were engaged.

This door opened immediately afterward, letting out a flood of light.

Two men came out into the hall, and Nick recognized the voice of the Jew.

"I shall be in New York for an hour to-morrow, and if it becomes absolutely necessary for you to see me, you can find me at McCoy's. But I would advise you to keep out of view unless it is a case of last necessity. Where is that old harridan I wonder? Mother Matt!"

This exclamation was followed by a heavy blow, and a horrified cry in a different voice.

There were sounds of a brief struggle.

"Curse you," gritted a voice. "Be quiet or I will settle you. Back into the room."

The door was slammed shut, leaving the hallway in darkness more complete than before.

"Come on," whispered the detective, and he rushed down the stairs, closely followed by his companion.

The Jew and his ally had been attacked as they were leaving the room where their interview had been held, by two men in masks.

The attack had been so sudden and unexpected that there was little or no defense.

A blow from a padded instrument in the hands of one of the ruffians had stretched the Jew senseless at the feet of his assailants.

His companion had been thrust back into the room by the second robber, and the door secured upon him.

The valise, which the Jew carried in his hand, had fallen from his grasp, and the ruffian bent over him for the purpose of securing it, as Nick and Chick rushed down the staircase.

The crooks started into an attitude of consternation at the first sound.

But before they could attempt to flee, Nick had gained the lower hall, and was within a dozen steps of them.

The terrified cracksmen could hear the click of the detectives' revolvers as they paused at a short distance.

"We've got you located, boys," said Nick, with quiet triumph. "Is it fight or throw up the sponge? Flash the glim!"

This last was spoken in an aside to Chick, who turned the light of a masked lantern upon the shrinking figures of the captured crooks.

The two rascals, taken as it were red-handed in their crime—dumfounded by the sense of a complete failure, blanched behind their black masks.

At their feet lay the body of the Jew, his black beard contrasting strongly with his cadaverous face and the rivulet of blood which was trickling from a wound upon his head.

The taller of the two men held the valise, which they had been so intent to gain, in his hand.

After staring in the direction of the light for a brief instant, he permitted the valise to drop from his hand as he exclaimed:

"Done, by Heaven! I shall call it off. Don't fire!"

He raised his hands above his head as he spoke, and took a step toward his captors.

Not so his companion, who was the shorter of the twain.

He uttered a shriek of defiance, whipped out his revolver and fired a shot at the mark presented by the dark lantern.

The bullet, though hastily fired, took effect.

It struck the glass of the lantern, and extinguished it as though a draught of air had blown against it.

"Each one for himself!" yelled the lucky marksman, who was O'Brien, the Kid, as he threw himself upon the valise containing the stolen bonds.

Nick fired a bullet through the space lately occupied by his form, but it was no longer there.

Seizing the valise the Kid made a desperate dash for liberty, and was imitated by his quick-witted, if more cautious comrade.

CHAPTER XVI.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

Chick discharged his pistol at random, and then grappled with Lally as he attempted to pass him.

Their struggle was brief and ended in a decisive victory for Chick.

He downed his man and clasped a pair of handcuffs safely upon his wrists, which settled the contest as far as he was concerned.

Nick was, in the meantime, having a more serious difficulty with his antagonist.

The Kid was a fiery little scrapper, and was determined to escape at whatever risk.

He had secured the coveted valise to a belt which he wore and rushed toward the front door with the weapon with which he had felled the Jew, in his hand.

The extinguishing of Chick's lantern had plunged the hallway in total darkness, and he ran into the detective's outstretched arms before he knew of his proximity.

The collision was not unexpected, however, and O'Brien struck out savagely with his club.

Nick caught the blow upon his wrist; his revolver was knocked from his grasp and his hand dropped pulseless to his side.

Nevertheless he held the crook with his left hand, forced him back against the wall, and then tripped him to the floor.

Chick had by this time secured his man and came to the detective's aid.

"Give in, you little d—l!" he exclaimed, gripping the writhing cracksman by the throat. "Give in, I say, or I'll throttle you!"

The prisoners now being secured, Chick, after lighting the lamp in the hall and taking the valise captured by the Kid into his possession, turned to an examination of the Jew.

The latter was not dead and so Chick bound his hands, and while thus occupied he heard a noise in the room where the Jew and the plotter had been in consultation.

Chick sprang into the room just in time to drag back an individual from one of the windows through which he was on the point of making his escape.

He had succeeded in prying open the shutters after much difficulty, and, but for Chick's attention to the Jew, would have effected his escape.

The fugitive uttered a howl that might have come from some famished animal, and turned to grapple with the detective.

He was a large man and possessed great strength.

Chick soon discovered that in his weakened condition, after his hot work, he could not handle him, and he cried out loudly for Nick.

An instant brought the latter to his assistance and, after a brief but fierce struggle, the maddened criminal was stunned by a blow from the detective's pistol.

"I wonder if there are any more of these rascals?" exclaimed the detective. "This fellow was a tough mark. Who is he?"

Chick flashed a light in the man's face.

It was George Long!

Chick uttered a shout.

"You were right, Nick," he cried; "Long was the man."

"So it would appear," answered Nick, gazing gravely upon the pallid countenance of the baffled and ruined plotter.

The two detectives carried Long out into the hall, where his fellow rascals were awaiting him.

"One, two, three, four, five," said Chick, counting them off upon his fingers. "A good haul all right."

Nick nodded.

After a moment's thought Nick said:

"Now, Chick, we must get some conveyances to take these rascals to a place of safe keeping."

Chick set out at once, leaving Nick on guard.

There we will leave him with the assurance that he conveyed his catch to prison cells in New York without disturbance or obstruction.

Indictments were found against Long and his tools for murder, and a long and interesting trial resulted in their conviction.

Long received the death sentence, but his health failed, and the sentence was commuted to imprisonment for life; he soon died in prison.

Carl Lally, Kid O'Brien and the other cracksmen all received long sentences, and are not liable to be in active prosecution of their business for some time to come.

The exposure of Long brought great trouble upon his family, and after his conviction they quietly removed from the city.

Harry Hanifran was proven upon investigation to have been a dupe of the plotter.

He is married to Paula, and if saddened by the trials they have passed, they are happy in each other.

Bob Matthews also found it convenient to leave the city.

His part in the plot of Mr. Long consisted only in the attempt to fasten the first small theft upon Jenny Mills.

He did this for the purpose of getting her into his power.

He was as much surprised as any one to find that Long was implicated in the larger theft.

Despite his large fortune, he could not escape censure, and his remorse tended to soften his character. It was some time before he could overcome Miss Mills' distrust, but she really loved man, and they were at last married, and are now living in Paris.

THE END.

The next number (No. 330) will contain "Nick Carter's Block Signal; or, Foiled in the Nick of Time." Nick has a way of arriving on the scene at critical moments and he did not break his rule in this case. He found plenty of excitement and as dastardly a plot on foot as was ever concocted. The apparent resurrection of the dead caused a staggering surprise to Nick's enemies and landed him on top when success seemed most hopeless. This great story in full in the next number.

STORIES OF MYSTERY.

Stories of mystery! There are a great many of them sent in here every week.

In some of them the mystery is very deep. Yet there is a deeper mystery than any that has yet been mentioned, and it is connected with this contest.

It is a mystery that it is puzzling some people. They are mystified over the numbers of stories that are sent in. Thousands upon thousands have poured in. Yet still they come.

Where do they come from?

Look on page 32, and you will find this mystery explained. You will find the prize offer there that has made nearly every boy in America enter this greatest of all contests.

Horse Thieves in Mexico.

(By Martin McMurtrey, East St. Louis, Mo.)

John Willis and Frank Reid were cousins, and wherever you found one you were sure to find the other. They had an uncle, who owned a ranch in Mexico. They went there on a visit. Their uncle had many fine horses. He gave the boys one each and they were rivals from the start. John's horse was a black, and he was the swifter for a short run. Frank's horse was a gray; he was almost as fast as the black, and he could beat him in a long run.

There was a gang of horse thieves, who had a rendezvous somewhere near their uncle's rancho. They stole horses almost every night, and always got away. They could be tracked to the edge of a small stream, which ran nearby, and there all trace of them was lost. One morning the boys got up and went out to the barn to see to their horses, and what was their surprise to find that they were gone! They went in and notified their uncle, who sent two of his rancheros, who were good trailers, to follow up the trail. They followed it to the edge of the creek, and there it ended like all the rest had. The next night these two men went down by the creek and hid by the side of the trail, and lay there until about twelve o'clock, when they heard hoofbeats some distance down the trail. They lay there and waited, and pretty soon the riders came up to where the men were lying, and stopped at the edge of the creek. The watchers were surprised to see that they were riding the black and the gray, and leading about six others. Their first impulse was to take their guns and demand the horses, but just then one of them gave a low whistle. It was answered immediately by [illegible] on the other side of the creek. Then the rancheros saw a sight which almost frightened them to death, for one side of the house, which was made of rock, was seen to swing open. From out of the opening rolled a long white thing, which looked like smoke. It ran down to the edge of the creek. Then a small flatboat came into view, as if by magic, and the horses walked upon it, and then the boat shot across the creek and on the other side the white thing touched the edge of the water. Then the horses walked upon it and right up to the house, when the boat disappeared and the white thing started to roll up, and it disappeared also inside of the house. Then the side of the house closed up and all was the same as usual.

The rancheros were speechless and were frightened pretty badly. They returned to the ranch and told the others what they had seen, and they were laughed at. The others said they must have gone to sleep and dreamed it, for the man who owned the house was the most popular man in that part of the country, and the idea that he had anything to do with the horse thieves was not to be thought of. His name was Don Carlos. So nothing happened for about a week and the boys were beginning to forget about the horses, and had each picked out a new horse, but they were not as good as the others. The boys thought they would try their new horses, so they decided to pay a visit to the Don.

When they got there he came out to meet them, and, of course, he wanted them to stay all night. He told one of his rancheros, who answered to the name of Pepo, to take care of the horses. He took the boys into the house and told them to make themselves at home while he went outside, for he had some business to attend to. While he was gone, Frank picked up a book and started to read, while John, who was an inquisitive sort of a fellow, started to examine everything in the room. The first thing his eyes fell on was the lifesize portrait of an Indian on the side of the wall, with a conspicuous-looking dagger in his belt with a brass button on the end of the handle. He reached up and touched the button, and, to his surprise, the picture swung back and showed a large opening with steps leading down into a cave. John stepped in and closed the door. He did not tell Frank, for he wanted to surprise him; but when he went to open the door he found that he could not. So he thought he would go down and look around. He believed he was in the cellar and could get out by some door which opened into the yard. But when he got to the bottom, he found he was in a low passageway and he had to stoop to walk along. Finally he thought he ought to be to the end, so he turned around to go back, but he could not find the steps, for the passage led off into many other passages. He kept on going until he came to a light, and he started to go more slowly. When he got almost to where the light was, he came to a large underground stable, with almost a hundred horses in it, and the black and the gray among them.

There was no one there, so he untied the black and the gray, but just then he heard distant footsteps. Soon two Mexicans came up. One was a man and the other was a boy. The man told the boy to feed the horses, for he wanted to make a trip that night, and then he went away. John saw him go and then he decided to take the boy a prisoner. He waited until Pedro had his back turned,

then he jumped out and grabbed him and soon had him down. Then, taking his revolver and holding it against Pedro's head, he made him tell all he knew. He told how they had wires running to the house, which worked the boat, and that there was a secret door in the side of the wall, which opened by pressing a button, and when you pressed another a strip of canvas rolled down to the creek and the horses walked on this up to the house, leaving no tracks.

John then took Pedro's sash and tied his hands and feet, and then took his handkerchief and gagged him. But before he gagged him he had changed clothes with him. He then rolled him back in the dark. All this time Frank sat there reading, but all at once he looked up and John was gone. He thought he had gone outside, so he put on his cap and walked out into the yard. While there he met the Don, who asked him where John was. He told him he did not know. The Don looked startled and began calling some names in Spanish. Five or six men came running up. He told them something in Spanish which excited them, and they started away, some running to the gate, some to the barn and others to the house. Frank asked the Don what was the matter, and he said: "I am trying to find John." Frank waited around until about dark for John, but he did not come, so he decided to go home without him.

He went to the stable to get his horse and led him out, and was about to mount when he saw two horses coming toward him. As soon as John had tied Pedro, he jumped on the back of the black, and leading the gray, let them take their own way. They turned from one passage to the other, and at last came to a door opening into the yard. He then started the horses on a run. Just then the man came out of the barn and saw him, but he kept on going until he came up to where Frank was, and Frank got on the gray and they started for the gate, the men following, some on foot and some on horseback. The boys rode down the road for home, and on the way met their uncle and some men, who were out looking for them. They told them what had happened. The Mexicans had not seen them yet, so their uncle told his men to hide on the side of the road. The Mexicans came up and were ordered to halt. They saw that they were caught, so they threw up their hands and the men bound them. The boys' uncle took the Don along with them to the house and made him show them where the horses were. They led them out into the yard, and the house was burned. The prisoners were put in jail and the horses were given to their owners.

The Forest Fire.

(By James King, Cambridge, Mass.)

Tom Warren's father was the engineer on a locomotive out West, and Tom, who was eighteen, was fireman. One day, as they were making their usual run between Chicago and Little Rock, Tom's father remarked: "Well, Tom, my boy, I shall be glad when this run is completed, and we land that treasure in the express car at its destination."

"Same here, dad," answered his son, leaning on his coal shovel, and wiping the moisture from his grimy face. "Suppose highwaymen should attempt to hold up the express car in those deep woods near the tunnel. Ugh!" and Tom, with a shrug of his broad shoulders, resumed his work.

Gallant old 48 had started from Chicago to Little Rock with one million dollars in gold on board, to be used in an investment for the company. The engine had gone through safely before, times innumerable, and as the sending of the money was a secret, except to a few trusted employees, no concern was felt for its safe delivery. No caution had been neglected, however, and the express car was a veritable fortress on wheels.

As Ben Warren, Tom's father, neared the exit of the tunnel, he began to look uneasy and shake his head, while a look of anxiety settled upon his usually peaceful face.

"What's the matter, father?" asked Tom.

"Something is wrong. I don't like that odor; can't you smell it?"

"Seems as if something is burning," and the old man began to sniff the air, suspiciously.

"My God, father, the forest is afire, and is sweeping after us with the speed of a hurricane!"

The suspicious smell that Ben Warren had noticed was the smoke from many thousands of barrels of tar, pitch and turpentine. As the storehouse where these combustible materials were stored was on the bank of a winding creek, shut in on all sides save one by the mighty forest, one can readily imagine how easy a fire could be started, that would destroy millions of dollars worth of property.

"Pile on the coal, my boy! Get up every ounce of steam she can stand!" cried the old man, excitedly.

Tom began to work with a desperation born of despair. He shoveled on the coal until the locomotive seemed to fairly dance along the glittering rails. The steam began to escape from the safety valve. Tom noticed it and crawled out on the swaying locomotive and firmly lashed it down; thus endangering the boiler of the faithful engine.

"Old Ben," in the meantime, had opened the throttle to its fullest extent, and the train swept on like the wind. On! on! on! the maddened flames rushed. Fed by tons of pitch and turpentine, they leap onward like a mighty fiery Niagara. The occupants of the coaches are on the verge of suffocation. Women and children fall prostrate on every side. Even strong men, cursing and praying alternately, see nothing but death facing them. Seven men, all students, arise from their seats, and clasping each other's hands for the last time in this world, present the muzzles of their revolvers at each other's heads, and pull the triggers at the given word of their leader. Seven reports and seven souls face their Maker!

In the cab of the engine the situation is appalling. The engineer is afire in a dozen places, but still he grasps the red-hot lever. Tom drenches his father with pailful after pailful of water, which is almost immediately turned into steam.

Sixty, seventy, eighty miles are reeled off by the gallant engine. Faster, faster yet the greedy flames leap on, until at last they seize the treasure car in their relentless grasp. In an instant the unfortunate car is uncoupled and left to stay the rapacious monster. A whirl, a roar and the history of the express car is ended, and still the flames rush on.

Uncoupling the treasure car proved the salvation of the train, for relieved of that weight, she forged ahead until she reached the almost incredulous rate of ninety miles an hour!

"If we can only reach that broad creek before the fire, we are saved, father!" exclaimed Tom, pointing to a large creek that flowed sluggishly across their course, and which was spanned by a trestle bridge.

Tom hearing no answer from his father, found that he was unconscious, but still the burned and charred fingers grasped the lever with a tenacity that was more than heroic.

The stream is reached at last, and old 48 plunges madly across it into safety.

Tom was a very sick lad after his thrilling run, and it took him several weeks to recover. As for Ben Warren, he was dead when taken from his cab.

After entirely recovering from the effects of his thrilling run, Tom set out on horseback to discover the cause of the disastrous fire. After a long ride he found a trail, which he followed. The trail led him to the shore of the little creek that the storehouse stood on. Here he found the bodies of two men, locked in each other's embrace. One held a long knife in his hand, which he had apparently plunged into the other's heart. A few feet away Tom picked up a Smith & Wesson revolver, with one chamber empty, except for the shell. Tom bent over the other man and saw a deep ragged hole, such as only could have been made by a bullet. Tom had very readily surmised that these men had killed each other, but for what?

Near the feet of these men there was a black mass of metal, which our young hero, after hacking away at it with his knife, discovered it to be the lost gold dollars, which had been melted in the awful heat of the fire.

Tom now approached the dead villains, and in searching the pocket of one, discovered a small notebook, which contained some writing. This is what Tom read:

"DEAR MART: The gang will fire the storehouse at three. Don't fail to be on hand. Yours, DICK."

Tom put the book back in his pocket. Then remarked to himself: "The rest of the gang must have perished in the fire, but these two fell to fighting among themselves over the gold, with this result."

Tom buried the gold until it could be conveyed to a place of safety, which was done the next day. The gang has met their just fate. Tom was made engineer, and received a handsome reward, but from that day until this, he never forgot the thrilling adventure he met in the forest fire.

Dick Dugan; or, The Bootblack Detective.

(By R. Blodgett, Brooklyn, N. Y.)

One night the people of —— County were startled by cries of "Help! Murder!" The officers next morning found a man dying to death. His brother said the dead man had a diamond ring, which was stolen off Mr. Jacob's finger. There were eight finger marks around his neck. He was taken to the morgue.

The next night a young man was hiding under a tree, watching the door of the house where the murder was committed. A few seconds later two men left the house. The boy followed them and heard one say: "Eight-Finger Tom meet me at Dago Pete's den."

That night a bootblack was waiting at Dago Pete's den with five officers. Pretty soon two men met; they were our hero's prey. Dick and the officers pounced on them, but one of them escaped.

"Eight-Finger Tom," said Dick Dugan, our hero, "I hold you for the murder of Mr. Jacobs."

"How do ye know I did it?" said Tom Dennis, alias Eight-Finger Tom.

"Because you are the only man with eight fingers in this county, and we will search you."

They found the diamond ring on the villain.

"Yes, I did kill him, because I had a grudge against him, and I needed money."

Eight-Finger Tom was punished for his dastardly crime. Dick Dugan, our boy detective, got five hundred dollars and now lives happy.

The Mysterious Murder of a Poor Farmer.

(By Homer Harlow, Milford, N. Y.)

Three years ago a farmer, living near the village of N——, was found dead, with a stiletto through his heart. Detectives were at once set to work, and found on the bone handle of the weapon the initials "T. B.," but nothing was found as to the owner of the weapon.

As time passed the tragedy was forgotten, until a few days ago, when four Italians were struck by a passing train. One was killed and three injured. The injured were sent to a nearby hospital. After a short time two of the men fully recovered, but the other, who was known as Joe Columbus, was told that he could live but a few hours. He then made a confession, stating that his true name was Tony Bundo. He confessed to murdering the farmer and also to murdering a policeman in New York, which was his reason for taking the name of Columbus. Tony then fainted, never to speak again. Thus the mysterious murder of the poor farmer was found out, and the culprit received his just dues.

The Mysterious Robbers.

(By Guy B. Daniels, Mansfield, Mass.)

It was as nasty as a night in August could be, for it was wet, windy and disagreeable, when I was getting ready to retire. I tried to sing for a while, but my voice was harsh and gave me no pleasure, and soon I got into bed. I couldn't seem to get to sleep. I tossed from side to side, trying to get into a comfortable position and arrange the bedclothes more satisfactorily. By and by I rolled over and my thoughts became so confused that I stopped trying to think.

It was about two o'clock when I awoke, startled by the sound of a closing door. I listened, but there was no sound save the rain, and I was about going to sleep again, when I thought I heard the gate latch rattle. What's that? Surely not some one coming up the walk. Yes, there was surely some one coming up the walk, with slow, soft, hesitating, sneaky footsteps.

The steps stopped. He must be walking on the grass

beside the path, and now he was on the walk again. I heard the loose section of the walk creak as he stepped on it, and then he came up and tried the handle of the door. For a time no sound, then the door softly opened and closed. I listened intently.

No sound. What was he doing downstairs? What was there for him to take? What can I do? Why, he must be leaving. Yes; the door opens and closes. The gate hinge creaked a little as it was softly opened and closed.

Gone! How relieved I felt! I lay back again, perhaps five minutes, and then more steps. Why, there are two this time. Yes, they came right up the walk, opened the door and came in, not so carefully this time.

What could I do?

As I lay under the heavy bedclothing, another step came sneaking up the walk and opened the door. Three robbers, and what am I to do? I remembered that there were some large torpedoes in the bathroom left over from the Fourth of July. I would get them and throw them onto the back porch from the bathroom window. I crawled out of bed and finally found what I was looking for. I took four and went to the window, which I found open at the top. I would throw two as hard and quickly as I could, and then I would yell.

I raised my arm. What was that? The gate? No; more steps on the walk? No. Why, it's that confounded loose shingle!

A very loose shingle on the edge of the porch raised and dropped in the varying wind and patted out steps and creaks and turning locks.

I went back to bed calling myself hard names for making burglars out of shingles.

A Strange Story.

(By Frank Reagan, Washington, D. C.)

A party of young men were seated in a clubroom, telling of experiences in their life, when one of the men said: "The new member has not told a story." All glanced at the new member, and saw a young man about thirty-five years of age, with pure white hair.

"Well," said the member, "I will tell you how my hair became white. I will not trouble you with the early particulars, but will just say that I was the only child of honest and respectable parents. They were both taken away together by a disease, and I was left alone to face the world in my eighteenth year.

"I had a talent for drawing, and by means of my inheritance, I took up my abode in Paris.

"I had two young French brothers rooming with me. They were good-natured, jolly fellows. Their names were Pierot and Gustave Gauchot. The only fault with one of them was that Gustave was a slight boaster.

"One night we were talking about ghosts, when Gustave said: 'For a wager I will spend the night in the haunted mansion.' The haunted mansion was a well-furnished house of a French millionaire. It was claimed to be haunted, and no one would stay in the house after they had seen what they declared were ghosts.

"But to return. After Gustave had said this, we went to bed. The next morning, before Gustave was awake, I called Pierot and told him of a plot to scare Gustave, and break him of his habit of boasting.

"I then went to the owner of the house and told him that a friend of mine would stay in the house all night if he was rewarded for it. The millionaire agreed to this, and I went to my room and told Gustave. Gustave said: 'I will stay there this very night.' That night, before the time appointed, we were all in the room. Suddenly Gustave said: 'I am ready to go now.' 'Take a glass of wine before you go,' I said. 'All right,' said Gustave. Pierot then got up and went out. After we had finished the wine, we set out for the mansion. When we had entered the place, I said to Gustave: 'I must now leave you,' and went out, but hid outside the door. After a while Gustave began to get sleepy, and, turning off the light, threw himself in bed. In a few moments the door opened and a white-robed figure stood in the door, and advanced toward the bed.

"The noise awoke Gustave, who said, very coolly: 'What do you want?' The figure said nothing, but again advanced. Suddenly Gustave drew a pistol, and, leveling it, cried out: 'Advance another step and I will shoot.' I was too horrified to speak, for I had not thought of this, and my hair stood on its end. Then, to my surprise and horror, the figure still advanced, and instantly six shots rang out on the air in quick succession. With a hollow, sepulchral laugh, the figure threw the six bullets in Gustave's face, and he, seeing such a supernatural occurrence, fell forward on his face. The shock had killed him. In an instant Pierot was at his brother's side, for the ghost was no other. He had anticipated Gustave shooting, and had extracted the bullets and filled in blanks. Then, arising from the corpse of his dead brother and seeing me, he cried: 'You are the cause of this!' and threw himself upon me. There was a slight struggle, for he was crazy and had the strength of a madman. He bound me to the foot of the bed and then yelled out in a frenzy: 'I am now going to kill you, first by putting out your eyes and tearing you limb from limb.' At this my blood fairly froze, and I cried out desperately to him. In a minute he had gagged me, and stuck a poker in the fire until it was at a white heat. In these few minutes my thoughts were full of agony, and I must have sweat blood, for I prayed to God to strike me dead.

When the poker was at white heat, he grasped it and advanced with a manaical smile upon his face, crying out in a frenzy of rage: 'Now, Gustave, you shall be avenged.' He prepared to thrust it in my eyes, when suddenly the silence was broken, by the report of a pistol, and the madman fell with a bullet in his brain. It was the watchman, who, hearing the pistol shots and my cries for help, had arrived in time to save me.

"After he had unbound me, he suddenly pointed to my hair, and, looking in a glass, I saw that my hair was white."

GOLDEN HOURS

Boys, have you any numbers of Golden Hours? If so, see if the following are among them: 134, 135, 156, 166, 167, 168, 169 to 192, 296, 389. I will pay liberal prices.

Address, WILLIAMS, Box 192, New York City.

Do You Want a Couple of These Books; Or Three, or Five, or Perhaps TEN?...

Get into this New Mystery Contest, If You Do! Here is a list of the Books, from which you may choose if you win a Prize : : : : : : :

FIVE FIRST PRIZES!
The five boys who send in the five best stories will each receive Ten Books from this list. :: ::

TEN SECOND PRIZES!
The ten boys who send in the next best stories will each receive any Four Books they may select in this list :: :: :: :: :: :: :: ::

FIFTEEN THIRD PRIZES!
The fifteen boys who send in the next best stories will each receive any Three Books they may select in this list. :: :: :: :: :: :: ::

TWENTY OTHER PRIZES!
The twenty boys who send in the next best stories will each receive any Two Books they may select in this list :: :: :: :: :: :: :: ::

55—Gilbert, the Trapper.....By Captain C. B. Ashley
56—The Rajah's Fortune.....By William Murray Graydon
60—The Mountain Cave.....By George H. Coomer
61—The Kric Talk Boys.....By Horatio Alger, Jr.
62—How He Won.....By Brooks McCormick
64—In the Sunk Lands.....By Walter F. Burns
64—The Tour of a Private Car.....By Matthew White, Jr.
66—That Treasure.....By Frank H. Converse
66—A Young Vagabond.....By Z. R. Bennett
67—Tom Brown's School Days.....By Thomas Hughes
68—Smuggler's Cave.....By Annie Ashmore
69—Pirate Island.....By Harry Collingwood
70—The New and Amusing History of Sandford and Merton.
By F. C. Burnand
71—Mark Seaworth's Voyage on the Indian Ocean.
By William H. G. Kingston
72—The Way to Success; or, Tom Randall.....By Alfred Oldellow
73—The Wolf Boy of China.....By William Dalton
74—The Dingo Boys.....By George Manville Fenn
75—The Boys in the Forecastle.....By George H. Coomer
76—The War Tiger—A Tale of the Conquest of China.
By William Dalton
77—Perils of the Jungle.....By Edward S. Ellis
78—Both Sides of the Continent.....By Horatio Alger, Jr.
79—The Rival Battalions.....By Brooks McCormick
80—Afloat in the Forest.....By Captain Mayne Reid
81—Arthur Helmuth of the H. & N. C. Railway...By Edward S. Ellis
82—The Young Editor.....By Matthew White, Jr.
83—The Tiger Prince.....By William Dalton
84—The Butcher of Cawnpore.....By William Murray Graydon
85—Facing Death.....By G. A. Henty
86—Catmur's Cave.....By Richard Dowling
87—The Five-Hundred-Dollar Check.....By Horatio Alger, Jr.
88—My Mysterious Fortune.....By Matthew White, Jr.
89—Pinton; or, Boy Life in the Country.....By Walter Aimwell
90—Out on the Pampas.....By G. A. Henty
91—The Crusoes of Guiana.....By Louis Boussenard
92—Specter Gold.....By Hezekiah Hill
93—A New York Boy.....By Horatio Alger, Jr.
94—Oscar; or, The Boy Who Had His Own Way...By Walter Aimwell
95—By Sheer Pluck.....By G. A. Henty
96—An Unprovoked Mutiny.....By James Otis
97—The Giant Islanders.....By Brooks McCormick
98—The Grand Cusco.....By George Manville Fenn
99—The Cruise of the Restless; or, On Inland Waterways.
By James Otis
100—Maori and Settler.....By G. A. Henty
101—The Lone Ranch.....By Captain Mayne Reid
102—Clearing His Name.....By Matthew White, Jr.
103—The Adventures of Rex Stanston.....By Mary A. Denison
104—Heir to a Million.....By Frank H. Converse
105—The Young Actor.....By Gayle Winterton
106—The Boy Knights.....By G. A. Henty
107—Van; or, In Search of an Unknown Race...By Frank H. Converse
108—Harry Revenge.....By Jules Verne
109—A Dash to the Pole.....By Herbert D. Ward
110—Around the World in Eighty Days.....By Jules Verne
111—The Wallypug in Why, Marmaduke Merry...By Wm. H. G. Kingston
112—Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea.....By Jules Verne
113—The Harvest of the Sea.....By G. A. Henty
114—The Old Man of the Mountains.....By Geo. H. Coomer
115—Adventures of an Athlete.....By Matthew White, Jr.
116—Happy-Go-Lucky Jack.....By Frank H. Converse
117—James Braithwaite, the Supercargo...By William H. G. Kingston
118—Jack Newton; or, The Fortunes of a New York Boy.....By Horatio Alger, Jr.
119—A Final Reckoning.....By G. A. Henty
120—In the Wilds of New Mexico.....By G. Manville Fenn
121—Fore Trawl.....By Wm. H. G. Kingston
122—From Rags to Riches.....By Horatio Alger, Jr.
123—The Giraffe Hunters.....By Capt. Mayne Reid
124—St. George for England.....By G. A. Henty

HERE ARE THE DIRECTIONS

This contest will close July 1st. Remember, whether your story wins a prize or not, it stands a good chance of being published, together with your name. To become a contestant for these prizes, you must cut out the Entry Coupon printed beneath, fill it out and send it together with your story, addressed to NICK CARTER MYSTERY CONTEST, 52 Duane st, Nothing will be considered that does not have this coupon accompanying it.

This Contest will be an interesting one here. The NICK CARTER WEEKLY has a bigger circulation than any magazine of detective work ever issued. The stories published in this contest will be read by nearly every boy in America.

COUPON

Nick Carter Mystery Story Contest No. 2

Name .....

Street and No. .....

City or Town .....

State .....

Title of Story .....

BUFFALO BILL STORIES

is the only publication authorized by Hon. Wm. F. Cody

THE WORLD-RENOWNED

Buffalo Bill

We were the publishers of the first story ever written of the famous and world-renowned Buffalo Bill, the great hero whose life has been one succession of exciting and thrilling incidents combined with great successes and accomplishments, all of which will be told in a series of grand stories which we are now placing before the American Boys. The popularity they have already obtained shows what the boys want, and is very gratifying to the publishers.

The Latest Titles are:

73.—Buffalo Bill's Death Charm; or, The Lady in Velvet.
74.—Buffalo Bill's Desperate Strategy; or, The Mystery of the Cliff.
45.—Buffalo Bill and the Black Mask; or, The Raffle of Death.
76.—Buffalo Bill's Road Agent Round-Up; or, Panther Pete's Revenge.
77.—Buffalo Bill and the Renegade Queen; or, Deadly Hand's Strange Duel.
78.—Buffalo Bill's Buckskin Band; or, Forcing the Redskins to the Wall.
79.—Buffalo Bill's Decoy Boys; or, The Death Rivals of the Big Horn.
80.—Buffalo Bill's Sure Shots; or, Buck Dawson's Big Draw.
81.—Buffalo Bill's Texan Team; or, The Dog Detective.
82.—Buffalo Bill's Water Trail; or, Foiling the Mexican Bandit.
83.—Buffalo Bill's Hard Night's Work; or, Captain Coolhand's Kidnapping Plot.
84.—Buffalo Bill and the Scout Miner; or, The Mounted Sharps of the Overland.
85.—Buffalo Bill's Single-Handed Game; or, Nipping Outlawry in the Bud.
86.—Buffalo Bill and the Lost Miners; or, Hemmed in by Redskins.
87.—Buffalo Bill's Tenderfoot Pards; or, The Boys in Black.
88.—Buffalo Bill and the Man in Blue; or, The Volunteer Vigilantes of Silver Thread City.
89.—Buffalo Bill and the Outcasts of Yellow Dust City; or, Fighting for Life in the Blizzard.
90.—Buffalo Bill's Crippled Crew; or, Sunflower Sam of Shasta.
91.—Buffalo Bill and the Boy Scout; or, The Tenderfoot Tramper of the Overland.
92.—Buffalo Bill's Young Double; or, A Yankee Boy in the Wild West.
93.—Buffalo Bill and the Silent Slayer; or, The Arizona Crack Shot.
94.—Buffalo Bill's Water-Gauntlet; or, The Mystery Man's Talisman.
95.—Buffalo Bill's Gallant Stand; or, The Indian's Last Victory.
96.—Buffalo Bill and the Black Mustang; or, Dick Dearborn's Death Ride.

PRICE, 5 CENTS. ALL NEWSDEALERS

STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK